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BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING FAMILY HISTORY MAGAZINE

ISSUE 238 CHRISTMAS 2025 £5.99

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- WW2 army records go online
- Christmas in the workhouse

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Welcome

Sarah's Top Tip

Consider whether your missing ancestor emigrated abroad

Nearly all of the questions sent to our 'Q&A' mailbox come from people requesting help to find someone missing from the records. There can be many reasons for this, but it's really important not to rule out emigration. People emigrated in large numbers during the 20th century, and it's definitely worth considering if someone disappears (even more so if other members of the family are known to have emigrated). On **page 48** Katherine Cobb considers this as a possibility for a reader. With so many overseas records available for free at **familysearch.org**, it's worth following up any leads, just in case.

Although family history is about people, we are very influenced by names. The branches of our trees with distinctive names are the ones we spend the most time on, with records and newspaper articles falling into our laps. On the other side, growing our Smith and Jones branches is fraught with uncertainty. On **page 14** Elizabeth Jones reveals some of the tips and tricks she has used to research her own family. Our art editor had fun finding lots of pictures of John Smiths to illustrate it with! And if names are your thing, you will love Alan Crosby's thoughts on the matter on **page 13**.

We've also got a fascinating article about the Ministry of Defence's War Detectives on **page 19**. The work they do is so important, and we are very grateful to them for taking time out of their day to share what they do and how they do it with our readers.

And talking of people doing important work, I hope you enjoy our article on The Salvation Army on **page 32**. Christmas feels like a good time to be thinking of those who tried to make a difference. We love hearing about your 'hero' ancestors, so keep sending them in.

Finally, please also send us any digital Christmas cards you create, inspired by our 'Tech Tips' article (**page 54**), and let us spare a thought for those in the past who had to spend the festive season in the workhouse (**page 56**). Have a wonderful Christmas everyone!

Sarah

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Contributors

Elizabeth Jones
Elizabeth is a Welsh genealogist and writer who shares her tips for researching common surnames on **page 14**. You can read more from her at **jonesthepen.weebly.com**.

Debbie Kennett
If you are considering buying a DNA test kit for yourself or a loved one this Christmas, genetic genealogist Debbie compares the offerings from the main companies on **page 23**.

Nicola Lisle
Nicola is a freelance journalist and author who specialises in family and social history. On **page 32** she celebrates the 160th anniversary of The Salvation Army.

COVER IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES/A YOUNG WOMAN THROWS A SNOWBALL WHILE STANDING BEHIND A TREE, 1947

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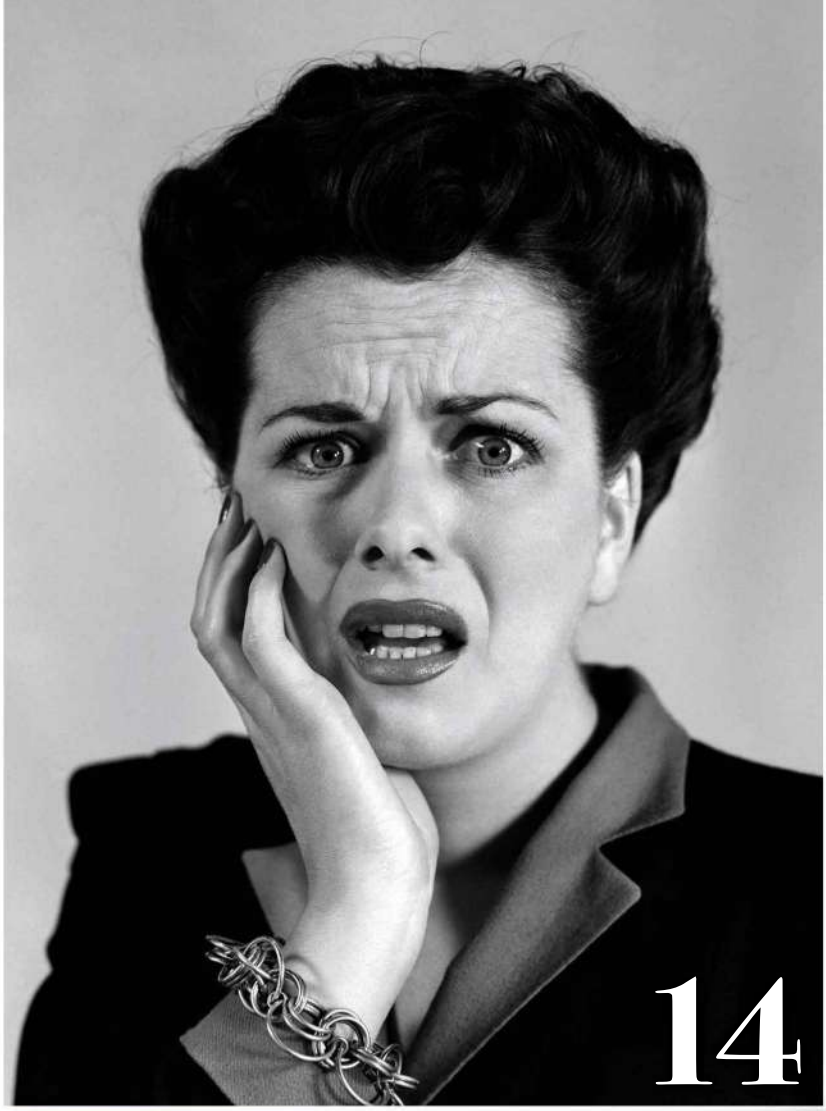

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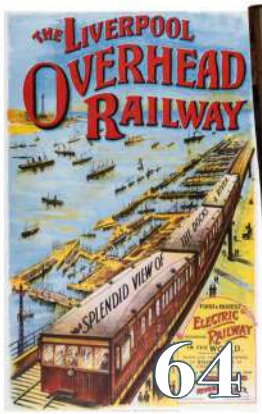

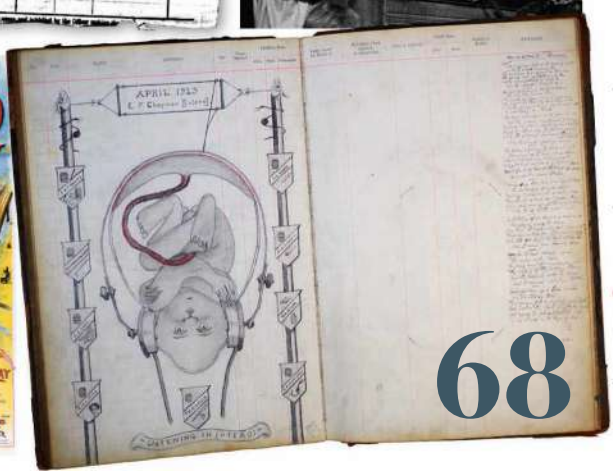

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Flying Squad

STAR LETTER

Jane's father Leonard Sidney Frank Walter photographed at his desk in 1943

Further to Neil Storey's article in the December issue about the role of animals in the Second World War, may I add some information about the part pigeons played.

In May 1939 the Military Training Act was passed, requiring every man aged 20 or 21 to present themselves for six months' military service. My father, Leonard Sidney Frank Walter, was drafted into the Militia on 17 July 1939 – just after his 21st birthday.

He first joined the Royal Artillery in Oswestry 11AA Militia Depot, having travelled by train from Newbury.

His sisters say that he was then sent to Benbecula in Scotland as part of the anti-aircraft defence – and at some point, he shot down a Messerschmitt.

He spent the first few months of his military service as an 'ordinary ranks' soldier, but then his potential was noticed and he was sent to the Officer Cadet Training Unit in Shrivenham in November. Thereafter he went to the School of Anti-Aircraft Defence (SAAD) in Manorbier, Wales, for officer training and gained his commission in April 1940, becoming a 2nd lieutenant in the Royal Regiment of Artillery (army number 1497930).

Len commanded several lofts used for breeding and training pigeons

Before long, it was discovered that Len had experience with pigeons, having owned a loft with many pigeons at his home in Enborne. He joined the Royal Corps of Signals' carrier pigeon section as a 2nd lieutenant in June, and was sent to Dunfermline attached to the 5th Command Signals. Then he was posted to Edinburgh where he remained until July 1942, being promoted to acting captain in 1941. He was in charge of the pigeon lofts in Stranraer and Edinburgh, as shown by his photos from that time.

My father's war record shows that on 21 July 1942 he was in the Edinburgh Royal Corps of Signals Regular Army Emergency Commissions Central Pigeon Service as a 2nd lieutenant (captain).

He was given embarkation leave of a few days before being deployed to the Middle East Pigeon Service. MEPS had been set up in early 1942 after the realisation that pigeons were still useful to the war effort, despite the new wireless technology.

He was given the rank of captain in charge of 13HQ Sections Carrier Pigeon Service, and arrived in Egypt in October 1942. He was promoted to acting major on 31 October 1942 aged 24. MEPS was based in the desert at Maadi Digla just outside Cairo, and Len was in charge of lofts based in Jerusalem.

A photograph album survives of his time in the Middle East. Although a lot of the pictures are black-and-white snaps of pigeons, there are also some interesting ones such as those of the first pigeon to be released from an aeroplane.

Len's army record shows him in July 1943 aged 25 as being the officer commanding several lofts used for breeding and then training the carrier pigeons. During the course of his tour of duty he was based in Jerusalem but travelled to many other places – there were lofts such as Idlib and Aleppo in Syria, Rutbah in Iraq, Beirut in Lebanon, and Nicosia in Cyprus.

Len remained in the Middle East after the war. The MEPS still had work to do: pigeons played a vital role in the clearing-up process, because other communications had been cut during battle.

He was demobilised on 6 December 1948 aged 30 with the honorary rank of major. He never talked about his army service, apart from to recall being the guest of honour at a dinner in the desert where he was offered and had to eat a sheep's eye to avoid causing offence.

My father had a different war from many of his friends, and the MEPS deserves to be remembered for the essential role it played.
Jane Barrett, by email

Editor Replies **Len certainly did have a different war to many others, so thank you for writing in so we could share his story with our readers. It's a good reminder of the variety of roles in the armed forces.**

Harvest Home

Caroline Roope's article in the October issue about harvest traditions brought back happy memories of my childhood in France. My family and I spent the summer of 1953 in the home of my grandmother in the Haute-Marne département. We experienced the traditional way of life going back to the French Revolution. My brother and I (aged three and six) went everywhere with our twin cousin farmers: herding the cows, trying to milk by hand, taking the milk to the co-op to make cheese.

The best memory is of haymaking *(la fenaison)*. We travelled on the horse and cart to a field. Antoine and Nanette scythed the grass. We helped rake the dried grass into piles with the huge handmade wooden rakes. During the midday heat, we picnicked. We kept the homemade cassis cool in the stream, mixed it with water and ate bread and cheese.

At the end of a tiring day, we headed home on top of the cart piled high. The scent of the fresh hay was wonderful.

Marie-Christine Frost, by email

Editor Replies: **That sounds truly idyllic Marie-Christine!**

This image from our October article on harvest traditions reminded Marie-Christine of haymaking in France in 1953

Canadian Trail

In the November 2023 issue you printed my letter about how my great great grandmother, Sally Richardson, moved to Canada with Matthew Binnington. I recently travelled there to follow some leads, and have an update.

Sally was not the first of our family to go to Canada. Her brother John and her first husband's sister, Elizabeth Autherson, arrived there in 1840 with their children.

The 1851 Canada census shows the families together: the Richardsons, Binningtons and Banks. John Richardson bought Crown land in Canada for 8s per acre. It was swampy and covered in forest, which had to be cleared. They built cabins out of the wood, and made a track by placing logs over the swampy ground.

All of the families appear to have been Primitive Methodists, and John set up the Temperance Hall and school on the land he owned. Sally died on 21 May 1861, Matthew in 1869 and John in 1886. I visited Laurel Cemetery and found all the families buried there.

Before 1863, Laurel was known as Richardsons' Corner because the three Richardson brothers John, William and Richard farmed on the three corners of the crossroads in the village.

Matthew left his land to Henry in his will. So the money went down the second marriage line with a small amount left to Ann Banks and Elizabeth Gray, who were Sally's daughters.

I'm planning to go back soon to find Sally's will and research the pioneer families they married into.

Pam Trace, by email

Editor Replies **Thanks Pam. It's great to get out in the field when you're researching your ancestors. You can get a real feel for how they lived.**

We asked you if you have criminal relations in a post about our article on using the *Police Gazette* (tinyurl.com/wdytya-pol-gaz), and Laurel Meyers responded

A 2nd-3rdish cousin was shot and killed by his wife of 4 months. The police ruled it an accident but I have doubts about that.

All In The Detail

I'm writing following Kate Brial's comment that "close enough isn't good enough" in her letter in the October issue regarding adding unchecked information to online family trees. Why don't more people use the General Register Office (GRO) records in the listings on the website?

Since the GRO released its online indexes for England and Wales, which now include all names on certificates and mother's maiden name for births between July 1837 and December 1924 and for deaths between July 1837 and 1957, which include age at death, I have made far too many changes to my family trees to list.

The web page you need is located at **www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/Login.asp**. Registration is required but there is no charge. Certificates can be ordered for £12.50, PDF images for £8 and digital images for £3.

Mother's maiden names are recorded on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and other birth record sets until about 1923, with maiden names continuing in Ancestry records. GRO records give full names up to 1934.

To date, the GRO site has helped me with mothers' maiden names/surnames from earlier marriages; time windows for second marriage; second marriages when both wives have the same first name; records for births prior to marriage; birth and death records for children who were born and died between censuses; and mothers who died as a result of childbirth.

I do check other records, such as censuses and marriage records, and the "children died" information included in the 1911 census, and view original documents. I frequently add these details to my tree.

Can the above information help us all to move our online tree entries away from "close enough" towards "as close, as detailed and as accurate as possible"?

Robin Richards, by email

GETTY IMAGES

Editor Replies: We're with you Robin, and hopefully your very informative letter will help.

Above And Beyond

I'm writing to emphasise the benefits of looking beyond the usual baptisms, marriages and burials when researching family members. My great great uncle Henry Last was born in Norwich in 1822, the son of Henry Last a carpenter and his wife Martha, and was buried there in 1886.

This was all we knew until I searched for Henry in the British Newspaper Archive (**britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**). I found that he was a carpenter like his father, and lived in Old Post Office Yard in Norwich. Henry appeared frequently in the local papers due to his many appearances in court both as accused and complainant!

However, I was shocked to learn that Henry was murdered at home in 1886. This caused a sensation, and was widely reported in both the local and national press. According to the *Norfolk News* on 21 August 1886 *(pictured)*: "An old man named Henry Last… has come by his death under circumstances which point to a crime of unusual brutality and wantonness… Last is described as of about sixty-eight or nine years of age, thinly made, and of about the average height. His house… is one of a group of small tenements just at the back of the Post Office Tavern."

The article describes how a friend of Henry entered the house and found the body under two sacks, which were "saturated with blood".

An initial inquest was held at a public house. The jury viewed the body. "At the suggestion of the Deputy-Coroner the jurors afterwards walked round to Post Office Tavern Yard and viewed the premises…The first room on entering the house was evidently used as a carpenter's shop, and divided from it by a thin board partition was a small space, which enclosed the fire-place, and in which the deceased man was accustomed to sit. It was here that the body was found."

Following a postmortem, an inquest was held in Norwich where the various injuries inflicted on the victim were listed in great detail, so much so that one of the jurymen fainted.

A verdict of wilful murder was reached. A local man, George Harmer, was found guilty, having beaten Henry to death with a hammer. Following the murder, he pawned several items taken from the dead man's house, including a pistol. He then took the train to London, where Detective Mason of Norwich Police arrested him.

George was subsequently hanged at Norwich Castle – the last man to be executed there. I recently paid a visit to the refurbished castle with my family. To our amazement, in a display case, we saw the pistol that had belonged to Henry, stolen during his murder. It had been kept by Detective Mason, where it was handed down in his family, who had subsequently donated it.

Without investigating these additional sources, I would have only known Henry's dates of baptism and burial, where he had lived in Norwich, and that he was a carpenter – and there was so much more for me to discover.

Patsy Little, Lowestoft, Suffolk

Editor Replies: Newspapers can be a wonderful resource for fleshing out relatives' lives – and deaths.

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DREADFUL AFFAIR AT NORWICH.

MURDER AND ROBBERY.

THE INQUEST.

An old man named Henry Last, who lived in one of the narrow throughfares between Exchange Street and Bridewell Alley, Norwich, has come by his death under circumstances which point to a crime of unusual brutality and wantonness. The affair is at present enveloped in mystery, and so little exists in the shape of a clue that the police, who are prosecuting active inquiries, have only been able, so far, to conclude that the deceased could not have died by natural means. Last is described as of about sixty-eight or nine years of age, thinly made, and of about the average height. His house, which few people other than its solitary tenant ever entered, is one of a group of small tenements just at the back of the Post Office Tavern, and is approached from Bedford Street by a narrow passage known as School Lane, and from Exchange Street by Hole-in-the-Wall Lane. It was here that the deceased man resided as a bachelor for many years, living in a style which, in view of the company he was known to possess, conveyed an impression of extreme poverty. He owned considerable house property in Norwich and elsewhere, and in the lower room of his house, which was used as a workshop, he supplemented his means by doing a little carpentering, in having been as a carpenter that he formerly earned a livelihood. He appears, so far as his retired habits would permit, to have lived on amicable terms with his neighbours, amongst whom, however, he naturally had a reputation for eccentricities.

The deceased was last seen alive between eleven and twelve on Saturday morning. Between nine and ten the same night a young man, a son of one of the neighbours, had occasion to go to Last's house, but there came no answer to his knock, and he noticed that the door stood ajar and the key on the inside. The neighbours, suspecting something, at once sent for Mr. Heydahl of the Livingstone Hotel, who appears to be the most intimate acquaintance the old man possessed, and on the arrival of that gentleman a lamp was procured, and an entry effected. In one corner of an apartment used partly as a workshop and partly as a sitting-room lay the body of the deceased man, face downwards, and covered with two sacks saturated with blood. One sack was beneath the body and the other folded across the back, whilst upon the head there were a number of severe wounds. The position in which the body lay in the room suggested the theory that Last was turning to his cupboard for something, when some one, advancing from behind, dealt him a blow which caused him to fall flat on his face, and then completed his ghastly work by dealing the old man the subsequent blows. The police were communicated with, and, as we have stated, active inquiries set on foot. A search of the premises confirmed the impression that the motive which prompted the crime was cupidity. All the drawers and every likely receptacle for [illegible]

deceased man, who was my landlord. In fact he owned all the three cottages in the yard. He had been a carpenter by trade, but we did not know much about his business. I last saw him alive about half-past ten or eleven on Saturday morning. He was standing against his chicken'-house, which is in front of my window.

Mr. R. J. Mills, surgeon to the police force, said:—I arrived at the residence of Henry Last at midnight on Saturday. The body lay upon a trestle in the middle of the room. I found various injuries to the head, of which I made a careful external examination. I found also a small pool of blood on the floor. Just inside the inner room was a little blood splashed on the inner side of the left hand lintel. The extremities were quite cold, but the abdomen was slightly warm. He had been dead at least five or six hours, and was quite stiff. I found no blood elsewhere, though I carefully examined the furniture.

The Deputy-Coroner—It will be more convenient if we have the full report of the *post-mortem* at the adjourned hearing. I think we had better not go into details of the injuries now. What do you think was the cause of death?

Witness—Undoubtedly the injuries to the head.

Do you think they might have been self-inflicted?—Certainly not, nor could they have been accidental.

The Chief Constable applied that the inquest should stand adjourned for a week in order that further efforts might be made to trace the murderer.

It was accordingly arranged that the adjourned inquest should take place next Monday at the Guildhall at eleven o'clock.

At the suggestion of the Deputy-Coroner the jurors afterwards walked round to Post Office Tavern Yard and viewed the premises. The house in every apartment was indescribably filthy, and even allowing for the recent presence of the deceased, whose handiwork, in the overturned drawers, boxes, &c., was everywhere apparent, the disorder of the place was truly extraordinary. The first room on entering the house was evidently used as a carpenter's shop, and divided from it by a thin board partition was a small space, which enclosed the fire-place, and in which the deceased man was accustomed to sit. It was here that the body was found. Upon the bottom of one of the lintels there were still visible stains of the murdered man's life blood. The only room in the house that contained a bed was on the second floor, which was filled with all sorts of lumber, useless, dirty, and discoloured. Heaps of clothing, copies of old periodicals, and a quantity of broken cobwebbed furniture were miscellaneously huddled together in a confusion which might well have added perplexity to a murderer's guilty haste. He, it was evident, had devoted himself chiefly to this apartment. The mattress and clothing on the unoccupied bed had been heavily thrown aside, clearly indicating that the plunderer had hoped to find booty there; whilst the drawers were pulled out, and a bureau opened, and their contents scattered in a manner which plainly spoke of recent hasty ransacking. There were two or three timepieces in the room, a watch pocket at the head of the bed containing a silver watch, which had stopped at about five minutes to eight. Another room on the same story was almost full of useless odds and ends covered with the accumulated dust of years, and on the third floor there were some bird-cages, still tenanted. It is said that deceased possessed property to the value of several thousand pounds.

STRANGE DOUBLE DROWNING FATALITY AT COLDHAM.

Coldham Hall was on Saturday the scene of an occurrence of a remarkably painful nature, two boys of the ages of ten and seven, the sons of a wherryman named [illegible]

SHOCKING [illegible]

On Saturday [illegible] inquest at the O[illegible] of James McA[illegible] found to death [illegible] on board the [illegible]

Charles Gibb[illegible] was one of the [illegible] Lowestoft vess[illegible] was that of Ja[illegible] watchman. W[illegible] also o'clock on [illegible] board the fishing [illegible] man, and when [illegible] was trying some [illegible] not understand [illegible] that he had got [illegible] removed it some [illegible] minutes with the [illegible] right. There we[illegible] sober when he s[illegible] Tye also went o[illegible] and when wit[illegible] heard the bo[illegible] opinion that d[illegible] took place accide[illegible] caused by the pas[illegible] doorway of the ca[illegible] Had the deceased [illegible] place in fairness [illegible] matter for him to [illegible] the hatchway was [illegible]

Police-constable [illegible] twelve o'clock (a[illegible] was lying in the [illegible] deceased on the [illegible] seemed to have b[illegible] to the Dead-hou[illegible] upon it a purse, [illegible] man named Jeav[illegible] cable, but he had [illegible] at all suspicious i[illegible] over, not charged [illegible] the foreman.

Mr. Allen Jeath[illegible] said he had extem[illegible] and he attributed [illegible] were bruises on the [illegible] his opinion that [illegible] death. Witness th[illegible] marks seldom [illegible] The jury agreed [illegible] death, and return[illegible]

SECOND V[illegible] NORI[illegible]

The annual pri[illegible] Yarmouth Rifle Ve[illegible] last week, and fair[illegible] times met at all fav[illegible] interesting with the [illegible] petitions, but the ne[illegible]

The contest comm[illegible] about £50, the rang[illegible] rounds at each range [illegible] the winners of prize[illegible] time won the top pri[illegible]

Private High, [illegible]
Corporal Wolve[illegible]
Corporal Bond, [illegible]
Corporal Barnab[illegible]
Private Debenh[illegible]
Private Cross, [illegible]
Private Hardy, [illegible]
Sergeant Bolt, [illegible]
Private Cotton, [illegible]
Private J. Hum[illegible]
Colour-Sergeant [illegible]
Corporal Bigg, [illegible]
Private Bunten, [illegible]
Bugler Taylor, [illegible]
Quartermaster C[illegible]
Private Wolvert[illegible]
Colour-Sergeant [illegible]

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What's On

Email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk* to feature your event here for free

PICK OF THE MONTH

This event shines a light on the dark side of Suffolk

Behind Bars - Suffolk's Criminal Past

Until 17 January
a **The Hold, Ipswich**
t 01473 296666
w **tinyurl.com/ticket-source-behind-bars**

A portrait of Margaret Catchpole

Discover the history of crime and punishment in Suffolk with this new exhibition from Suffolk Archives. The county has been home to some notorious crimes, including the 1827 murder of Maria Marten, known as the 'Red Barn Murder'. The exhibition also features the story of the last public execution in Suffolk; the tale of horse thief, convict and folk hero Margaret Catchpole, whose letters from Australia are available on display in the UK for the first time; and investigates what a crime is, from riots and protests to medical care and self-expression, as well as how policing and prisons have changed over the years. Free.

SUFFOLK ARCHIVES

IN PERSON

Eldercide: Older Jews And The Holocaust

Until 30 April
a **The Wiener Holocaust Library, London**
t 020 7636 7247
w **wienerholocaustlibrary.org/exhibition/eldercide-older-jews-and-the-holocaust/**

Explore the experiences of the older victims of the Holocaust with this new exhibition. Free.

Life After Liberation

Until 13 September
a **Jersey Museum, St Helier**
t 01534 633300
w **jerseyheritage.org/visit/whats-on/life-after-liberation/**

This exhibition examines how Jersey met the challenge of the years following the end of the Germans' occupation. Free.

The Creation Of Dickens' Christmas Carol

5 December
a **St Mary's Church Hall, Bedford**
e *secretary@bfhs.org.uk*
w **bfhs.org.uk/talks.html**

Steve Dimmer will reveal how Dickens wrote his novel, and how it influenced the Victorians and later generations to embrace Christmas. Free to Bedfordshire Family History Society members, small charge for non-members.

Cribs, Cards And Christingles

6 December
a **Dartford Science and Technology College**
t 01322 527604
w **tinyurl.com/nwkfhs-cribs**

Mark Lewis explains Britain's Christmas traditions. Free to North West Kent Family History Society members, non-members asked for a small donation.

Journeys Through The Archives: Bringing The Past To Life

8 December
a **British Library, London**
t 01937 546060
w **events.bl.uk/events/journeys-through-the-archives**

Edmund de Waal *(The Hare with Amber Eyes)*, Dr Alexis Wolf *(Transnational Women Writers in the Wilmot Coterie)* and Dr Mathelinda Nabugodi *(The Trembling Hand: Reflections of a Black Woman in the Romantic Archive)* discuss "the extraordinary value and rich possibilities of archives" and how they inspire their writing. £12.

From Bones To Books To Blitz Scrap

10 December
a **The London Archives**
t 020 7332 3820
w **bit.ly/tla-scrap**

Learn about the history of recycling in London during the Second World War, then called 'salvage', in this illustrated talk from Dr Henry Irving of Leeds Beckett University. £10.

How Popular Was Jane Austen?

11 December
a **National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh**
t 0131 623 3700
w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-nls-popular-austen**

As part of the celebrations of Jane Austen's birth 250 years ago, Prof. Katie Halsey reveals the most popular female authors during her lifetime. Free.

IN PERSON & ONLINE

Tracing Postal Workers

4 December
a **Society of Genealogists, London**
t 020 7251 8799
w **bit.ly/sog-postal**

Discover how to trace ancestors who worked for the Post Office with this one-hour talk from Susannah Coster, an archivist at The Postal Museum. £10.

The Fencible Regiments In Britain And Ireland, 1793–1802

5 December
a **National Army Museum, London**
t 020 7730 0717
w **nam.ac.uk/whats-on/fencible-regiments-britain-and-ireland-1793-1802**

Historian Rory Butcher tells the story of the forgotten temporary 'Fencible Regiments' of the late 18th and early 19th century. Free, booking required.

ONLINE

Jane Austen At Christmas

10 December
w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-austen-christmas**

This webinar from The National Archives sees historian Annie Gray explain how Christmas was celebrated during the Regency period. Pay what you can.

Coffee Time Talk: Beyond The Boxes

19 December
w **swheritage.org.uk/events/beyond-the-boxes/**

South West Heritage Trust staff will discuss what they've been up to in 2025, and their plans to make the most of the archives of Devon and Somerset in 2026. £5.

BOOK AHEAD

Learn how to take your research back further than ever before

Introduction To Medieval Genealogy

Starts 5 January
w **pharostutors.com/introduction-to-medieval-genealogy**

In this online course from Pharos Tutors, Gillian Waters shares her expert advice for tracing your tree beyond the 16th century, covering topics such as pedigrees and Heralds' Visitations. Four sessions. £86 unassessed or £108 assessed.

News

Rosemary Collins and **Sarah Williams** report on the latest data releases and genealogy news

Ancestry releases Second World War service records

Family history website Ancestry (ancestry.co.uk) has launched a major new collection of service records from the Second World War.

The company was awarded the contract to digitise the records, which were previously held by the Ministry of Defence but are now in the process of being transferred to The National Archives at Kew (TNA; **nationalarchives.gov.uk**), in 2023.

It released its first tranche of records, including service records from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and other smaller units, at the end of 2024.

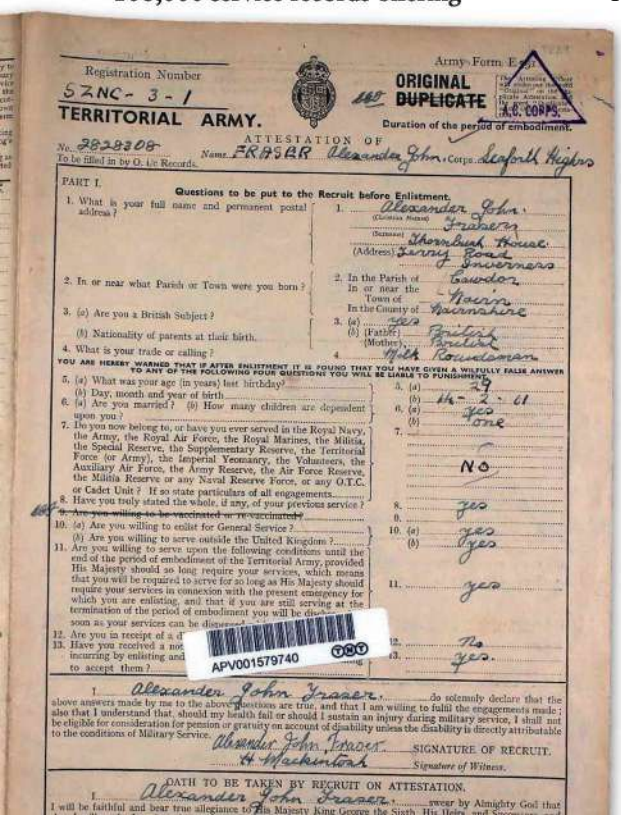
The new collection, 'UK, Military Service Records, 1939–1959', will continue to be updated and will eventually contain more than two million service records, mostly for men who served in the infantry, although records for men in the Royal Signals and Royal Armoured Corps have also been found in the collection.

This first tranche consists of about **106,000 service records offering** 247,029 separate records in total, including names of next of kin.

Details of British infantrymen, such as these soldiers photographed in 1940, are recorded in the collection

The records come from TNA's series WO 422 and do not include officers or personnel from the Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers, Cavalry or Guards regiments. They also only include men who reached the age of 45 or were discharged before 30 June 1959 when legislation changed so that only veterans who entered the military after 1948 were liable for Reserve service. As a result some younger soldiers may not be included.

The records consist of attestation papers, which include details such as the man's name, address, profession, age and date of birth; service records, including any promotions, reductions, injuries or medals; and tracer cards that detail a soldier's postings.



Registration Number 5ZNC-3-1
TERRITORIAL ARMY.
Army Form E
ORIGINAL DUPLICATE
Duration of the period of embodiment.
ATTESTATION OF
No. 2828308 Name FRASER Alexander John Corps Seaforth Highrs
To be filled in by O. i/c Records.
PART I.
Questions to be put to the Recruit before Enlistment.
1. What is your full name and permanent postal address? 1. Alexander John (Christian Name) Fraser (Surname) Thornbank House (Address) Ferry Road Inverness
2. In or near what Parish or Town were you born? 2. In the Parish of Cawdor In or near the Town of Nairn In the County of Nairnshire
3. (a) Are you a British Subject? (b) Nationality of parents at their birth. 3. (a) yes (b) (Father) British (Mother) Brittish
4. What is your trade or calling? 4. Nth Roundsman
YOU ARE HEREBY WARNED THAT IF AFTER ENLISTMENT IT IS FOUND THAT YOU HAVE GIVEN A WILFULLY FALSE ANSWER TO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING FOUR QUESTIONS YOU WILL BE LIABLE TO PUNISHMENT.
5. (a) What was your age (in years) last birthday? (b) Day, month and year of birth. 5. (a) 29 (b) 14-2-11
6. (a) Are you married? (b) How many children are dependent upon you? 6. (a) yes (b) one
7. Do you now belong to, or have you ever served in the Royal Navy, the Army, the Royal Air Force, the Royal Marines, the Militia, the Special Reserve, the Supplementary Reserve, the Territorial Force (or Army), the Imperial Yeomanry, the Volunteers, the Auxiliary Air Force, the Army Reserve, the Air Force Reserve, the Militia Reserve or any Naval Reserve Force, or any O.T.C. or Cadet Unit? If so state particulars of all engagements. 7. NO
8. Have you truly stated the whole, if any, of your previous service? 8. yes
9. ~~Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated?~~ 9.
10. (a) Are you willing to enlist for General Service? (b) Are you willing to serve outside the United Kingdom? 10. (a) yes (b) yes
11. Are you willing to serve upon the following conditions until the end of the period of embodiment of the Territorial Army, provided His Majesty should so long require your services, which means that you will be required to serve for so long as His Majesty should require your services in connexion with the present emergency for which you are enlisting, and that if you are still serving at the termination of the period of embodiment you will be dis... soon as your services can be dispe... 11. yes
12. Are you in receipt of a d... 12. No
13. Have you received a no... incurring by enlisting and ... to accept them? 13. yes.
APV001579740
I, Alexander John Fraser, do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagements made; also that I understand that, should my health fail or should I sustain an injury during military service, I shall not be eligible for consideration for pension or gratuity on account of disability unless the disability is directly attributable to the conditions of Military Service.
Alexander John Fraser SIGNATURE OF RECRUIT.
H Macintosh Signature of Witness.
OATH TO BE TAKEN BY RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION.
I, Alexander John Fraser, swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King George the Sixth, His Heirs and Successors ...

One of the attestation records included in the digital collection recently added to Ancestry

Although service and casualty forms are included, giving dates and places for treatment, the soldier's medical records are redacted because of privacy concerns. Information about his next of kin are included, although details of any children are also redacted.

Once all of the records in WO 422 have been added to the collection, Ancestry will start to digitise WO 419 records which consist of more than 830,000 records of other ranks discharged from the infantry of the British Army between 1921 and 1939. These will mostly be men who had served during the First World War.

Sarah Williams, editor of *WDYTYA? Magazine*, said, "This first tranche of records will open the door to a better understanding of what the rank-and-file soldiers in your family did during the Second World War. Veterans did not always talk about their experiences, but we can at least get some idea of the action they saw and use these records as a stepping-stone to further research."

GETTY IMAGES

NEWS IN BRIEF

TheGenealogist adds County Waterford records

Family history site TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**) has added a new transcription-only collection of over 900,000 Catholic parish records from County Waterford in Ireland, which date from 1673–1945. They include the baptism of Thomas Meagher on 4 August 1823 at the Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity in the city of Waterford. Meagher *(right)* became a leader of the Irish independence movement, and fought in the American Civil War before becoming acting governor of Montana.

The new FreeBMD website

New FreeBMD site arrives

FreeBMD has launched a new-look website at **freebmd2.org.uk**. The new version of the site, which offers free transcriptions of civil birth, marriage and death records, is designed to be easier to search, with improvements including automatic suggestions for surnames, first names, counties and registration districts; the option to search all of England and Wales; 'Revise Search' and 'New Search' buttons; improved name consistency; the ability to sort results; and easier options to download and share records. The original website **freebmd.org.uk** will continue to be updated and "remain available for the foreseeable future".

Portland Street in Manchester in the late 19th century

Census research 'proves Engels wrong'

Victorian Manchester was less segregated by class than generally believed, according to a PhD history student at the University of Cambridge (www.hist.cam.ac.uk).

Emily Chung used the 1851 census records, Ordnance Survey maps and commercial directories to categorise the houses of Manchester residents by profession. She found that over 60 per cent of buildings housing the wealthiest classes also housed unskilled labourers, while over 10 per cent of the population in Manchester's poorest neighbourhood belonged to wealthier employed classes.

This contrasts the depiction of the city made famous by Friedrich Engels, the co-founder of Marxism, in his 1845 book *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, where he described Manchester's classes as living separately.

Chung said that segregation between the classes in Manchester was more due to differences in work routines, recreation, shopping and public services.

"Segregation in cities remains a major concern in many parts of the world, so understanding what people experienced in Manchester, one of the world's first industrialised cities, is really important," she added. "It teaches us that where we live matters but other factors can be even more influential. How people work, shop and relax divides social groups and can even make them invisible."

CAN YOU HELP?

The National Archives of Ireland (NAI; **nationalarchives.ie**) has launched a search for living individuals born in the modern-day Republic of Ireland before 18 April 1926 – the date of the 1926 census of Ireland, which will be published online next year on its 100th anniversary. It is estimated that there are more than 1,000 people still alive who were recorded in the census. The NAI wants to recruit these individuals as 'centenarian ambassadors', and capture their first-hand personal testimony as part of a programme of events to mark the launch of the census. This includes people born in Ireland who now live in the UK or other countries. If you or a family member are interested in becoming a centenarian ambassador, please email *census1926@nationalarchives.ie*.

This photo from the launch depicts NAI director Orlaith McBride and the minister for culture, communications and sport Patrick O'Donovan

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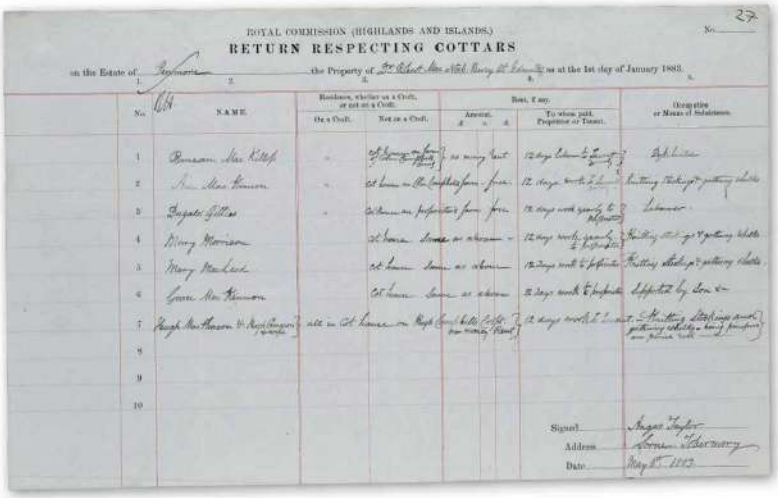

ROYAL COMMISSION (HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS.)
RETURN RESPECTING COTTARS

Cottars return for the estate of Penmore, Mull, January 1883

Scotland's People releases Napier Commission records

Government website Scotland's People (scotlandspeople.gov.uk) has published the records of the Napier Commission online.

The commission, chaired by Lord Francis Napier, was established in 1883 to address growing unrest among the crofters (tenant farmers) and cottars (farm labourers) of the Scottish Highlands and Islands. They had been suffering poverty and upheaval for a century, brought on in part by the mass evictions known as the Highland Clearances.

The commission carried out an extensive survey of the crofters and cottars, and travelled around Scotland conducting interviews. The newly digitised records contain the names of about 16,000 people. They include returns by proprietors or factors of estates that may hold the names of individual crofters and cottars, and details such as the rents that they paid.

The records can be searched on Scotland's People. A page can be viewed for two credits (equivalent to 50p), or browsed for free via the online platform Virtual Volumes at **https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/virtual-volumes/reference-search**.

University of Strathclyde calls for proposals for genealogy conference

SIGS is based in the Graham Hills Building at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

The Strathclyde Institute for Genealogical Studies (SIGS) at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, has issued a call for proposals for presentations, workshops, panel discussions and posters for its latest international hybrid conference. Beyond the Family Tree: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on AI, DNA, Education and Community in Genealogy will take place there on 25 and 26 June 2026, and marks the beginning of a year of celebrations of the 20th anniversary of postgraduate genealogy courses at the university. Submissions should be aimed at an audience who have an intermediate to advanced level of knowledge and understanding. Guidelines for submitting proposals are available at **www.strath.ac.uk/studywithus/centreforlifelonglearning/genealogy/beyondfamilytreeconference2026/**, and the deadline for proposals is 8 December.

Thomas James

The subject of an 1821 portrait of a black soldier has been identified by the National Army Museum (**tinyurl.com/guard-port-nam**)

£16

The new cost of ordering probate records in England and Wales from **probatesearch.service.gov.uk**, up from £1.50

Policing

The Museum of Policing in Devon and Cornwall is to have its collection of thousands of artefacts digitised (**tinyurl.com/bbc-pol-dig**)

Burke's

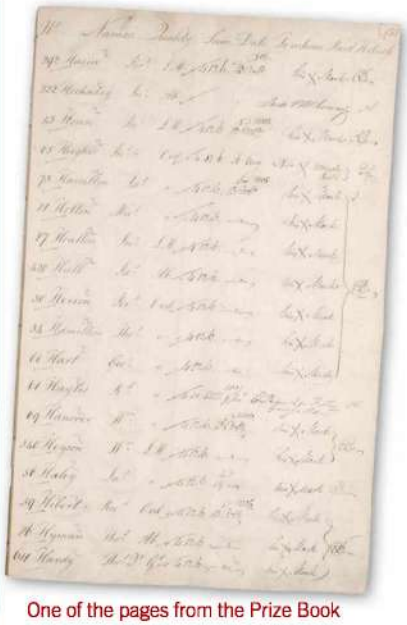
The 1871 *Burke's Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland* has been published on **thegenealogist.co.uk**

2,522,499

The number of Doncaster parish records that have been added to **ancestry.co.uk**

Cabrach

The Scottish community has created a tapestry commemorating the First World War (**tinyurl.com/stv-cabrach**)



One of the pages from the Prize Book

Findmypast adds the Trafalgar Prize Book

Family history website Findmypast (findmypast.co.uk) has digitised the Battle of Trafalgar Prize Book to mark the 220th anniversary of the battle on 21 October 2025.

The 1805 Battle of Trafalgar was a major engagement between the British and the French and Spanish navies off Cape Trafalgar in Spain. Despite being outnumbered, the British scored a great victory under the command of Admiral Horatio Nelson, at the cost of his life. The battle established British naval supremacy.

The Battle of Trafalgar Prize Book records 17,050 sailors who received prize money after the battle. Traditionally, once an enemy ship, or 'prize', was captured, its cargo, guns and hull were sold and the profits divided among the crew according to rank.

Many of the ships that were captured after the Battle of Trafalgar were destroyed in a storm, meaning that they could not be sold. The British government offered a £300,000 grant in compensation instead.

The book is an unusually complete record of the distribution of this prize and the men who fought at Trafalgar.

NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND | UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE

Curious Names At Christmas

Alan Crosby gets festive with parish registers

How do you name your child if your surname is Christmas? Or what name do you give him or her if the baby is born at that time of the year? I'm not entirely sure what the convention is in the second quarter of the 21st century, but in 18th-century Norfolk the parents' imaginations ran riot. Years ago, while doing extensive family history research in the county, I kept a list of the numerous extraordinary, weird and often hilarious names recorded in the baptism, marriage and burial registers. It would appear that just about any name was acceptable, and that most vicars were not fazed by the sheer oddness of the choices parents made.

What, in later years and grown to adulthood, the somewhat unfortunate children made of it is not recorded, which is perhaps just as well. I cannot imagine that Christian Freaks (baptised 1765 Norwich St Margaret) or Marmarice Caromania Barham (1802 Great Yarmouth) or Pleasance Shittle (1788 Beeston-next-Mileham) were too enamoured of their names, although for the last one of these it's hard to think of any effective way of drawing attention away from the deeply unfortunate surname. Comfitt Cadiwould (married at Besthorpe in 1719) sounds like a warm, roly-poly person, but I'm not sure about Bosom Body (married at Bedingham in 1738), especially as he was a man.

The creativity is seemingly limitless – twins called Orange and Lemon, the somewhat daring naming of a daughter as Freelove Smith (Norwich St Peter Permountergate, 1768) and Noble Wasp (baptised at Norwich St Mary Coslany in 1773) were among my favourites. Grime Liddelow (baptised Norwich St Gregory in 1770) must have grown up to be a gritty working-class hero, whereas Brighten Silver, a young man who married at Yarmouth in 1789, presumably made a career selling domestic cleaning products.

Christmas Eve Steward was baptised at Norwich St Clement

But what of the Christmas names? Christmas Eve Steward was baptised at Norwich St Clement in 1777. Steward is a fairly familiar name in the Norwich area, so what better way had the parents to distinguish their son from the common herd than by giving him that name. It is at least reasonably dignified, and left nobody in any doubt as to his birthday! Babies are prone to colic, but I don't believe that was the inspiration behind Christmas Windy (Norwich St Augustine 1778) or Christmas Breeze (Norwich St Clement 1828). The season itself surely determined the thinking of the parents of Christmas Bush (married in 1710 at Barton Bendish St Andrew) and the really quite poetic Christmas Cockoday (Norwich St Gregory). The mother and father of Christmas Bunn (baptised 1779 at Norwich St Martin at Oak) may have had food on their minds – I did not find a Christmas Cake or a Christmas Pudding, but I'm certain they existed somewhere.

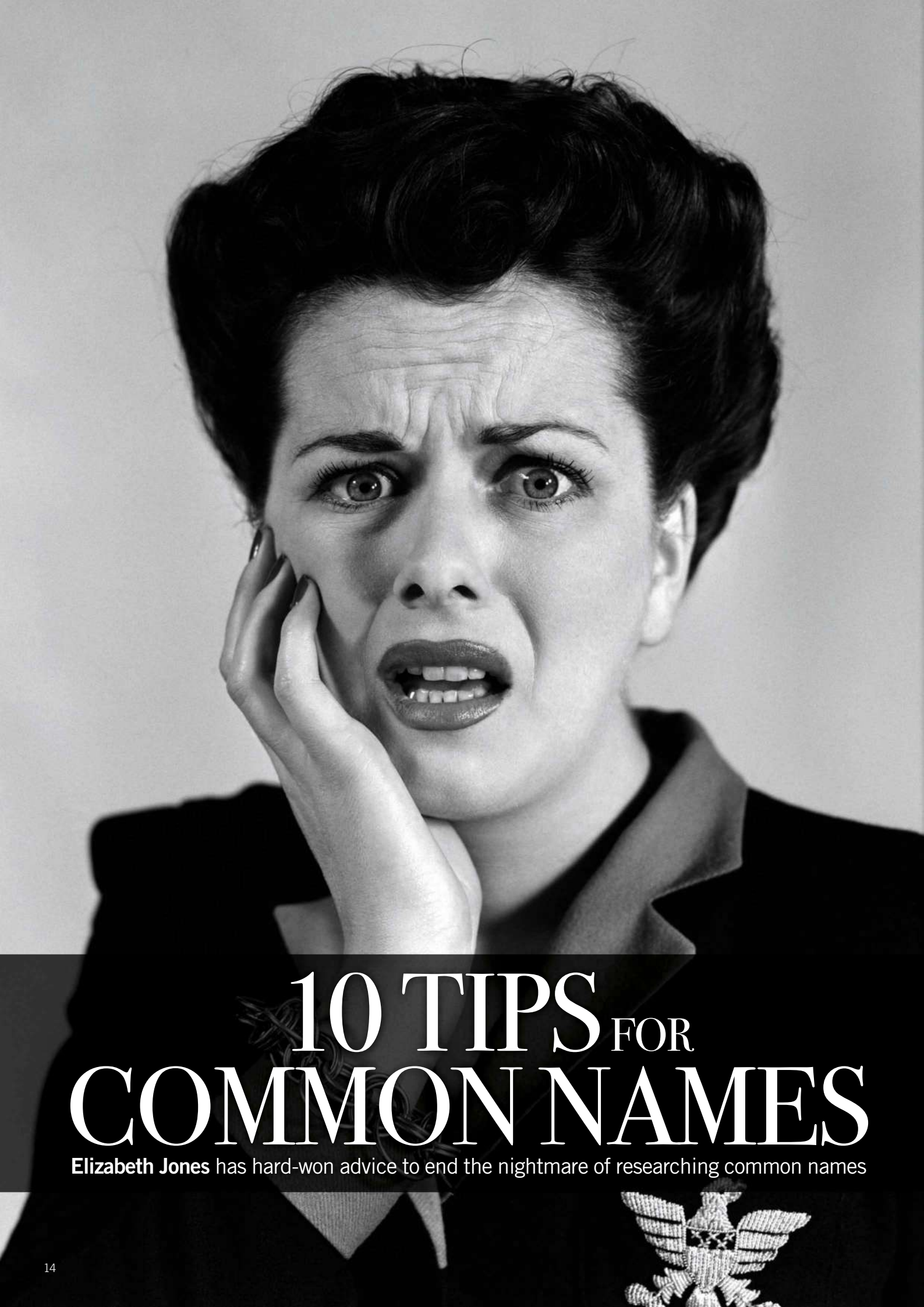
A rather strange sense of parental humour is evident in the case of Christmas Knight (Yaxham, 1825), and inevitably there was a Christmas Day. She was married at Great Yarmouth in 1811. Christmas was usually a name given to a baby boy, but there were exceptions.

Overall, though, Christmas appeared as a first name much more often than any other season or festival. The other special days and calendar highlights do not seem to have had the same appeal, though I did find Advent Smith (Norwich 1777), Midsummer Calf and Pentecost Wooden (Great Yarmouth 1820 and 1777 burial respectively).

Sometimes it was the quirks of destiny that brought certain names together, as when George Christian married Christian Wright at Norwich All Saints in 1795, or John Bream Fish married Mary Scales at Attleborough in 1789. And a prize of some sort is due to the parents of a young man who married at Thrigby in 1753. With the surname Boatwright, there could realistically only be one possible first name: they called their son 'Noah'.

ALAN CROSBY lives in Lancashire and is the editor of *The Local Historian*

ILLUSTRATION WWW.SUEGENT.COM



10 TIPS FOR COMMON NAMES

Elizabeth Jones has hard-won advice to end the nightmare of researching common names

Tracing your family tree is a lot like detective work: you spend hours sifting through documents, piecing together clues, and solving puzzles. One of the trickiest puzzles to solve is that of the ancestor with a common name. As a Jones from Wales, I know just how frustrating this can be. Try searching for 'Thomas Jones' in any 19th-century record set and you'll quickly find yourself drowning in a sea of potential matches.

When searching for my miner great grandfather of that name, who moved to Glamorganshire from either Cardiganshire or Carmarthenshire, depending on which census he filled out, I went down several wrong paths. One particularly convincing candidate turned out to be the cousin of the man I was looking for. After a lot of hard work, and a little bit of luck, I eventually tracked the right Thomas Jones down to a small village in Cardiganshire. Along the way, I even discovered a forgotten half-brother who had witnessed Thomas' wedding. This small detail helped confirm that I was finally on the right track.

When researching common-name forebears, a single incorrect assumption can send your research spiralling down the wrong path. That is why it's so important to cross-check and verify every assumption and potential match.

If you're facing a similar challenge, don't worry – you're not alone. Here are some practical tips and tricks I have picked up on my own research journey.

Elizabeth Jones is a writer and editor from South Wales, as well as a keen historian and genealogist. Find out more at **cymruuncovered.substack.com**

This 1911 photo of the officers on RMS *Olympic* includes Captain Edward John Smith *(far right)*, later captain of RMS *Titanic*

GETTY IMAGES

1 Create A Detailed Profile

When researching common-name ancestors, simply knowing their name and date of birth often isn't enough to pick them out among all the potential matches. But despite the common name, your forebear was still a unique individual.

Create a detailed profile/fact sheet for your relation. Include everything you know about them, such as the dates of baptism/birth, marriage and burial/death; where they were born, lived and died; religion; ethnicity; and occupation(s). Also add what you know about their family members, friends, neighbours, colleagues and any witnesses on legal documents.

Don't forget to include any family stories connected to your ancestor. While these shouldn't be taken as fact, they often hold a grain of truth that might help. Your research may also uncover the truth behind the story.

Collating all of this information may be time-consuming, but it allows you to build a full picture of your relative's life. It also helps highlight gaps in your knowledge, and identify new avenues of research.

Remember to keep your fact sheet updated as you go along too. This living document will quickly become an essential tool in tracing your common-name ancestor.

2 Construct A Timeline

Use the information collected in your ancestor's profile/fact sheet to create a biographical timeline. These have a range of uses. They can help you spot gaps in your forebear's history, or reveal conflicting information. If you lack documented evidence then a timeline also helps you to estimate a date range for key life events, for example birth and death dates for your ancestor or their children.

Adding world or national events can help to put your relation's life into a broader context, explaining migration patterns and changes in employment or lifestyle.

Timelines also serve as a useful reference guide for research trips to archives, and are an excellent way to share your findings with interested family members.

3 Look For Name Variations

The further back you go into your family's past, the more likely you are to encounter variations in someone's name. Before literacy became widespread in Britain, many people were unable to spell their own name. As a result, names recorded in official documents were often spelled phonetically. This led to inconsistent spellings across different records. You should make a note of any variations you come across in your ancestor's profile/fact sheet, and when sifting through record sets, use the different spellings or wildcards to widen the search.

In addition, if your forebear migrated to an English-speaking country from somewhere where the language wasn't spoken, then they may have anglicised the spelling of their name. Unfortunately, whenever prejudice ▶

against people of different backgrounds was commonplace, anglicisation helped them to avoid discrimination.

Also, people didn't always use their given name. It's not unusual to find people using their middle name, baptismal name or even a nickname in official records. Searching for a relation using their middle name as their forename can lead to the breakthrough you are looking for.

4 Search Every Record Set

Take the time to go through every available record set. This should include land deeds, school admission records, coroner's reports, hospital and workhouse records, court and prison records, military service records, trade directories and newspaper archives. All of these sources can provide insights into your ancestor's life.

Don't rely solely on transcripts, either – if possible, you should always look at the original document. This may contain additional information that doesn't appear in the transcript. Also, both human transcribers and transcription software sometimes make mistakes, or omit details that may be vital.

If you've created a detailed profile/fact sheet of each relation, make sure you update it with any new information you learn.

London-based printmaker John Smith turned German artist Godfrey Kneller's portrait of him into a mezzotint in 1716

5 Explore Their Immediate Family

If your common-name ancestor is proving difficult to trace, try looking into their family unit. Immediate relations, such as their spouse or sibling, may prove to be easier to locate, especially if they have a less common name.

Finding a family member may lead you to your elusive forebear. For example, after my family moved to the industrialised Welsh Valleys, older children were often sent back to rural West Wales to help out on the family farm. Finding my relative on their grandparents' farm allowed me to take my research back another few generations, and it also gave me a new location to research and added a new branch to my tree.

Naming patterns can confirm family relationships and eliminate incorrect leads

6 Investigate Their Community

As the saying goes, no man is an island – and the same applies to your common-name relation. If you've hit a brick wall with their story, try researching their community.

Begin by reviewing their profile/fact sheet and making a list of the people around them. This should include friends, business associates, work colleagues and neighbours. Researching these people and their relationships to your ancestor could reveal previously unknown familial relationships.

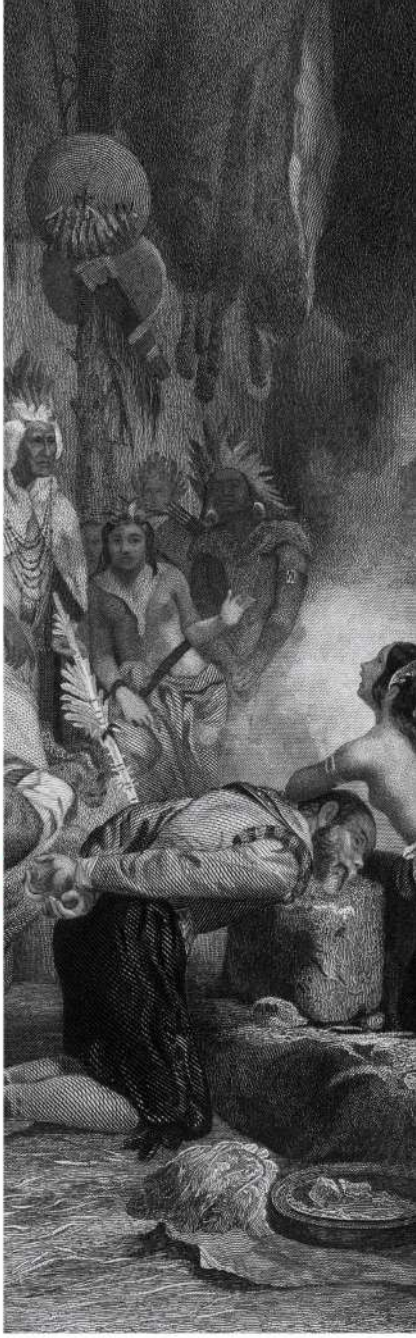
Relations often lived close to each other, either in the same street or in neighbouring streets. Neighbours who regularly appear in your forebear's records could suggest a familial relationship.

Also, siblings, cousins or other relatives would often act as witnesses and godparents, while someone with a different surname who regularly appears in records and at family events could be a married sibling or cousin.

Remember to look at where your ancestor worked and worshipped as well. Many people's social lives revolved around clubs and societies linked to their place of work or church/synagogue. Researching the people your relative socialised with might give you a breakthrough. At worst, you'll gain a better understanding of the life that they led.

7 Research A Place, Not A Person

If you find yourself overwhelmed with a long list of potential matches for your common-name ancestor, shift your focus from researching the person to the place. Use your forebear's profile/fact sheet and chronological timeline to pinpoint where they



John Smith, leader of the Labour Party, with MP Margaret Beckett, 1992

Pocahontas Saving the Life of Capt. John Smith, an engraving created by Alonzo Chappel in 1861

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lived. You can then research everyone with your relation's surname in that area. Tracking patterns and family groups helps you identify potential matches to your family.

Surname studies can be time-consuming, especially with common surnames or densely populated areas, but they can help you open up a whole new family group. For more information, see the website of the Guild of One-Name Studies: **one-name.org**.

8 Pay Attention To Naming Patterns

Naming patterns were widely used in Britain from the early 17th century to the early 20th century. Reflecting a desire to keep family names alive, they are a useful tool for family historians.

Naming patterns not only help confirm family relationships but also eliminate incorrect leads. For example, when looking at a potential match, if the names of their siblings and parents don't match those of people already confirmed to be in your family tree, then you may find that you're looking at the wrong person.

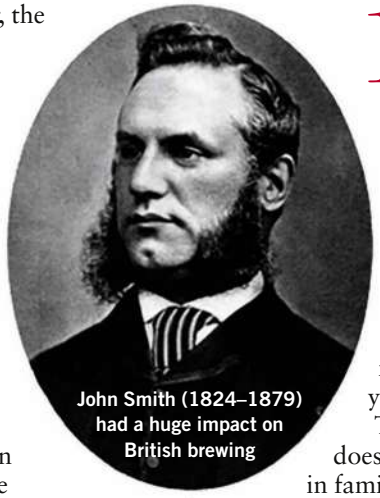
The most common British naming pattern ran as follows. The first son was named after his paternal grandfather, the second son after his maternal grandfather, the third son after his own father, and the fourth son after his own father's eldest brother. Similarly the first daughter was named after her maternal grandmother, the second daughter after her paternal grandmother, the third daughter after her own mother, and the fourth daughter was named after her mother's eldest sister.

Later children were named after aunts, uncles and great grandparents, while a common Scottish variation switched the order of grandparents.

Naming patterns often led to names being repeated across generations. In some cases, names were even repeated within the same generation. During my own research, I thought I'd found a match, only to discover it was actually a cousin with the same name.

High rates of infant mortality also played a part in the naming of children. A deceased child's name was often reused for a younger sibling, particularly if it had been chosen to honour a grandparent.

Another tradition that kept names alive was to use the mother or grandmother's maiden name as a middle name. However, as is always the case with naming patterns, ensure you back up your theories with facts.



John Smith (1824–1879) had a huge impact on British brewing

John Francis 'Jack' Smith junior was the chief executive officer of US firm General Motors between 1992 and 2000

9 Rule Out Everyone Else

If, after all your research, you are still left with a list of potential candidates, try a technique known as 'anti-research'. This means investigating each potential candidate, and using the information you have gathered about your common-name ancestor to rule them out. Eventually, you should be left with just one candidate: your relative.

This is a time-consuming process, but if all of the other methods have failed, it is your best option. At worst, it will help you narrow down an intimidatingly long list of candidates to a handful of potential matches.

10 Discuss Your Research

When you've spent too long researching the same individual, it's easy to lose perspective. When this happens to me, I find it useful to talk through my research with someone else. A fresh pair of eyes can revitalise a stagnant search, spotting connections you've missed or asking questions you hadn't considered.

The person you talk to doesn't even have to be interested in family history. They just have to listen. Sometimes just talking through your ideas and research out loud helps you to reassess ideas and spot flawed assumptions.

If you haven't got anyone willing to listen, and don't feel like sharing your query with the magazine's Facebook Group, try taking a break. Focus on a different branch of your family tree, or step away completely for a few days. This allows your brain to switch from focused problem-solving to a more creative mode that is likely to deliver new insight.

At times researching common-name ancestors can seem like an impossible task. However, with a little organisation, a touch of creativity, a dash of patience, and a lot of methodical research, you can break down even the firmest brick wall.

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Meet The War Detectives

Claire Vaughan finds out about the work of the researchers at the Ministry of Defence who identify the remains of soldiers missing in action, some of them since the First World War

On 25 September 1915, the first day of the Battle of Loos in Pas-de-Calais, northern France, the British began their offensive against German defences at Artois and Champagne. During the advance, 20-year-old Lieutenant James Grant Allan, 9th Battalion, Gordon Highlanders, took two bullets to the chest, according to an eyewitness account. A scout tended to him, turning him onto his front, but he was found dead soon after. The War Diaries record that Lance Corporal Gordon McPherson of the 7th Battalion, Cameron Highlanders, also died that day, aged 23. Neither bodies were recovered for burial.

Exactly 110 years later, to the day, in a peaceful corner of Loos British Cemetery, a sombre crowd looked on beneath the autumn sky, as Lieutenant Allan and Lance Corporal McPherson were finally laid to rest. Among those paying their respects were 'War Detectives' from the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and relatives of the dead men, who had waited a long time for closure.

Lieutenant Allan and Lance Corporal McPherson are just two of the hundreds of soldiers who have been identified by the Commemorations Team in the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), which is based at the Imjin Barracks in Gloucester: **www.gov.uk/guidance/mod-war-detectives-the-joint-casualty-and-compassionate-centre-commemorations-team-what-we-do.** The men's story featured in *The War Detectives*, a half-hour BBC documentary broadcast in September and again in November (see the box). However, there are still half a million British servicemen missing from the First World War alone, so there is plenty of work left to do.

Scottish regiments attack German trenches at the Battle of Loos

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Every case begins with the discovery of human remains, and a subsequent call to the recovery unit at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC; **cwgc.org**) for retrieval of these and any artefacts found with them – from rusted belt buckles, buttons and regimental insignia to more personal items. Any remains where identification might be possible are passed on to the JCCC.

'The Military Is A Family'

The team, which has existed in its current form since 2015, deals with all missing British service personnel from 1914 to the present day and comprises just five individuals: Tracey Bowers, Nicola Nash, Rosie Barron, Heather Small and Alexia Clark, who spoke to us on the team's behalf. "The military is a family which looks after its own, and whether you died yesterday or 110 years ago, you will be afforded respect, dignity and care," she says. They are the only authority in the UK that can formally identify missing men from a conflict that they cover.

So how did these specialists become involved in what is a fairly niche role? "We have a range of different backgrounds and experience, which is what makes the small team work so well – with historians, archaeologists and ex-Army personnel all represented." It seems there isn't a set path to becoming a War Detective. "The core skills are research skills – both historical and genealogical, and event planning; after all, we don't just identify the soldiers but we also plan, organise and deliver their full military funerals too.

"We are family-liaison officers – right from asking for a DNA sample, through to confirming a DNA match, and eventually delivering the funeral. We guide our families through the whole thing. We're on hand to answer questions, help them to understand the process, aid in choosing readings for the service, and after the event make sure that they get copies of any photos and so on."

In addition, members give lots of talks to different organisations about the work they do, "from Cubs and Brownies, to Women's Institute groups, local history societies and veterans' groups".

As you might expect, given all that the role involves, there is never a 'typical' day. "We can be in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Albania, Korea etc, and our days are shaped by where we are and what we're there to do," Alexia explains. "We work with the Army, the Navy and the RAF, and all three have their own traditions and their own ways to work. Otherwise we're in the office – tracing families, doing research online and planning our next trips – or away visiting The National Archives at Kew, museums and other record centres."

Many of the techniques and resources that the team uses will be familiar to family historians: "There are two main strands to our work – the identification of soldiers whose remains have been recently recovered, and the identification of men who are already buried but are currently unknown soldiers whose graves bear the inscription 'Known unto God'. In both cases, we consult War Diaries, regimental histories, trench maps, Red Cross records, casualty lists, exhumation and burial reports, and more.

"In the case of newly found soldiers, we will also use the artefacts discovered with them to guide us in our research. For example, shoulder titles indicate the regiment a man served with, a Small Box Respirator gas mask

Solving The Puzzle

The researchers' work has been highlighted in the BBC series *On the Front Line*

The War Detectives, a recent episode of the BBC News series *On the Front Line*, revealed how the team identified Lance Corporal Gordon McPherson and Lieutenant James Allan.

"The two Scottish soldiers whose burial was featured were interesting cases," Alexia tells *WDYTYA? Magazine*. "They were found on a site that had been undisturbed since the end of the First World War, but which was now being reclaimed for building purposes. They were actually two of around 120 men whose remains were recovered from that site – a mixture of British and Canadian service personnel, and casualties from both the Battle of Loos and the 1917 Battle of Arras.

"When we looked at the British casualties as a whole, it proved impossible to extract any DNA at all from the majority of the 1915 casualties – possibly due to ground contamination or similar. McPherson and Allan were special from the start, as they actually gave decent DNA profiles. There are literally hundreds of Scottish soldiers missing from the Battle of Loos, and indeed many of their comrades from this site have had to be buried as unknown Scottish soldiers."

German and British dead from the Battle of Loos

Lieutenant Allan's brother Nimmo was in the same regiment, and in a letter home wrote, "Dear Mother, I am quite safe… I suppose you know the awful news that Jim has been killed."

Alexia adds, "A button bearing the insignia of the Newcastle Corporation Tramway helped us to identify Lance Corporal McPherson. The 1911 census revealed that the father of one of the men missing had worked for the Tramway, and DNA testing then proved his identity."

GETTY IMAGES

Lieutenant Allan and Lance Corporal McPherson are laid to rest in Loos British Cemetery on 25 September 2025

JOINT CASUALTY AND COMPASSIONATE CENTRE

would indicate that he died after August 1916, and a personal item might even give us a clue to his name or number, or perhaps his civilian occupation or home town. Ultimately we use DNA testing to confirm the identification."

Research Challenges

Of course, some cases really test the team's skills. "Our most challenging cases are the ones where we get stuck right at the very start – either because we have trouble extracting DNA from the remains, or because tracing suitable DNA donors through a family proves tricky. A recent case in which this happened involved two soldiers recovered near Soissons. The first challenge was that the remains were actually fairly scant, so we didn't know if it would be possible to extract any DNA from them at all. We later discovered that these men had been manning a gun emplacement that suffered a direct hit – possibly explaining the paucity of remains surviving.

"The second challenge was tracing a suitable DNA match for a soldier with the surname Smith. Being absolutely sure that you have followed the correct familial lines is really challenging at the best of times, but with over half a million Smiths in the UK, this was particularly difficult!

"Luckily, it all panned out. Our scientists worked their magic to get us a viable Y-STR DNA profile [a short tandem repeat on the Y-chromosome, widely used in surname DNA projects], and we did eventually find the right Smith family, allowing our man to be buried with a headstone bearing his name in 2024."

Some cases leave a lasting impression, though. "The saddest ones for us are often the ones where it just isn't possible to make an identification. This can happen for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes you have a suitably small pool of candidates that it could be, but extracting DNA proves impossible and so identification simply can't be made. Sometimes you can't trace a living relative at all for a candidate, or you just can't find a match despite everything pointing towards one particular soldier.

"We are also aware of cases where the artefacts found with the remains of the soldier – such as regimental cap badges – have been removed by unscrupulous individuals before the bodies were reported. These items are crucial in the identification process, and knowing that a man's chance to be buried with his name has been removed in the pursuit of profit or illegal collecting is both sad and extremely frustrating.

"The other sad ones are the cases where it becomes clear that there's a real story within the family – perhaps he was an older soldier who died leaving a widow and a bunch of tiny children fatherless, or perhaps one where all of the boys in a particular family were killed in the war."

So what's the most rewarding thing about being a War Detective?

"Telling somebody that you have found their great uncle, grandfather, cousin etc, and sharing the information we've uncovered about their military service is always incredibly special," Alexia reveals. "While we don't 'bring them home' per se, as they are always buried in the country they died in alongside their comrades, we do provide the closing chapter of their stories. It is emotional for us, but also immensely satisfying."

CLAIRE VAUGHAN edits our 'Q&A' section, and writes our 'Reader Story' articles

Resources

Take your research further

COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

w **cwgc.org**

Formed in 1918, the CWGC commemorates and cares for the war graves of almost 1.7 million individuals across 150 countries and territories. The website can tell you more about the organisation's cemeteries, and hosts a database of records of war dead that includes details of where they are buried.

FACEBOOK

w **facebook.com/wardetectives/**

The MOD War Detectives page has details of funerals and other events.

JCCC COMMEMORATIONS TEAM

w **www.gov.uk/guidance/mod-war-detectives-the-joint-casualty-and-compassionate-centre-commemorations-team-what-we-do**

Learn how you can attend a military funeral, or help to identify a soldier.

OLD FRONT LINE

w **oldfrontline.co.uk/2025/06/14/the-mod-war-detectives/**

Military historian Paul Reed interviews the team in this episode of his First World War podcast.

• *The War Detectives* is available on BBC iPlayer until September 2026: **tinyurl.com/bbc-iplayer-war-detect**

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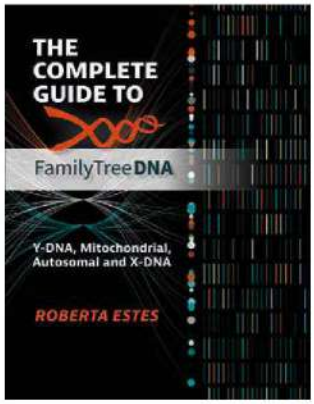
THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO FamilyTree**DNA**:

Y-DNA, Mitochondrial, Autosomal and X-DNA

By Roberta Estes

Just some of what's covered:

- **The science behind DNA tests – written for everyday people**
- **Y-DNA – Your Father's Story – types of markers and how to use your results**
- **Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) – Your Mother's Story – matches and what they mean**
- **Autosomal Family Finder Tests – Matches to all your family lines**
- **X-DNA – Your secret tool that's included with Family Finder**
- **An extensive glossary explaining the vocabulary associated with DNA testing.**



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BUYER'S GUIDE TO DNA TESTING

Debbie Kennett gives her expert verdict on the DNA test kits from the five main companies, so you can decide which one is right for you

DNA testing has proved to be a transformative tool for family history, allowing genealogists not just to verify their existing research but also to make new discoveries and break through brick walls. DNA relies on the power of large matching databases to connect you with your genetic relatives. More than 50 million people have now taken an at-home DNA test, and the databases continue to grow at a steady pace enabling many more discoveries. AncestryDNA (**ancestry.co.uk/dna**) has the largest database, with over 27 million people tested. If you've not yet taken the plunge, the firm's test is a good starting point. But there are also benefits to be gained from testing with other companies, both to access additional features and to match with relatives who have not tested with AncestryDNA. Look out for sales, especially in the run-up to Christmas, and sign up to the magazine's weekly email newsletter for the latest discounts.

DNA testing is uncovering all sorts of family secrets, so be prepared for surprises. Some people are finding that the father who raised them is not their biological father, or that they have siblings they knew nothing about. However, DNA is also providing answers for adoptees, foundlings and donor-conceived individuals who can work with their matches to identify biological parents.

DNA testing is uncovering all sorts of family secrets, so be prepared for surprises

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There are five main companies offering DNA tests for genealogy. You will usually need a subscription to unlock the full features of the test, such as additional reports or access to the family trees of your matches.

The most popular test is an autosomal DNA (atDNA) test. This gives you matches with your genetic relatives on all of your ancestral lines, but is best used for finding connections within about the last five or six generations. We inherit 50 per cent of our DNA from each of parents, and we share on average 25 per cent with our grandparents and 12.5 per cent with our great grandparents. As we go further back in time we find that some of our bona fide genealogical ancestors are not our genetic ancestors, because of the random way that atDNA is inherited. We would expect to match all of our second cousins, but theoretically only about 30 per cent of our fifth cousins.

An atDNA test will also give you a report on your ancestral origins, where your DNA is matched with reference populations from different regions of the world. Some tests will also give you health and trait reports.

Y-chromosome (Y-DNA) testing is another popular option, although this test can only be taken by men because only males have a Y-chromosome. The path of the Y-chromosome usually coincides with the inheritance of surnames and, because the Y-chromosome is passed on virtually unchanged from father to son, it can provide information about both recent and distant ancestry on your direct male line.

Finally a mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) test can be taken by both males and females. It tracks the direct maternal line, and can also provide information about both recent and distant ancestry.

Here's how the offerings from the main companies compare.

Debbie Kennett is a genetic genealogist and wrote *DNA and Social Networking* (The History Press, 2011)

23ANDME

23andme.com/en-gb, from £89

23andMe pioneered the field of personal genomics, and was the first company to offer a relative-matching service way back in 2009. However, the main focus has always been on health. The firm offers a wide range of health, trait and ancestry reports, and is the only direct-to-consumer company providing health reports approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The company has recently recovered from bankruptcy proceedings, and is now back on track after being bought out by the TTAM Research Institute, a consortium led by Anne Wojcicki, 23andMe's co-founder.

There are about 15 million people in the 23andMe database, but a lot of them have tested for health reasons and have not opted into relative matching. Although the database is somewhat USA-centric and there are currently very limited tools for working with your matches, you may find good matches here who are not in any other database.

The Ancestry Composition feature provides good granularity, and for some populations is superior to the equivalent feature at AncestryDNA. Males will receive a report on their Y-DNA haplogroup, reflecting their deep ancestral origins. Both males and females will receive an mtDNA haplogroup report. There are also fun features such as the Neanderthal DNA Report, but a subscription is needed to access additional reports and tools.

BEST FOR

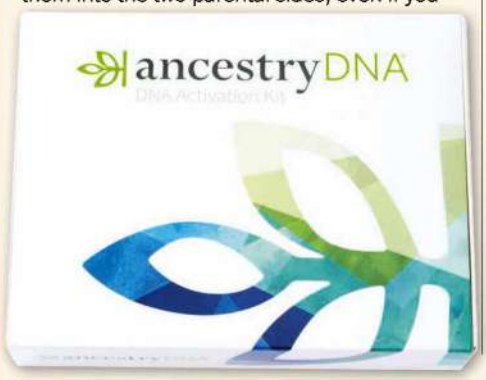
23andMe offers a wide range of easily understandable health and trait reports, and a variety of deep-ancestry reports that aren't available elsewhere.

ANCESTRYDNA

ancestry.co.uk/dna, from £79

AncestryDNA is the market leader with a large and growing database of more than 27 million people. You are likely to get your best matches at AncestryDNA. Link your DNA results to your Ancestry tree to get the best results.

Ancestry has excellent tools for working with your matches. The SideView technology splits them into the two parental sides, even if you have not tested your parents. AI-powered tools such as ThruLines and Common Ancestor hints help you to find the connections with your matches, while the Shared Matches tool, used in combination with the coloured labels, allows you to sort your matches into groups to make it easier to identify common ancestors.



The Ancestral Origins report is updated every year, with each new version improving granularity. The Ancestral Journeys information provides an indication of your more recent origins within the past 300 years, with fine-scale resolution sometimes down to a particular town. SideView even allows you to see which parent contributed each ancestral region or journey. Traits reports are available for a small additional fee.

You will need a subscription to access the full features. There is also an add-on Pro Tools subscription providing additional options.

BEST FOR

With the largest database and good integration with family trees, the AncestryDNA test is the most popular test for genealogists.

FAMILYTREEDNA
familytreedna.com, from $79

FamilyTreeDNA specialises in Y-DNA and mtDNA testing, and is the only company with Y-DNA and mtDNA matching databases that can be used for genealogy purposes. A Y-DNA test is best taken if you have a particular hypothesis to explore, for example determining whether or not two men with the same surname from the same county share an ancestor. Y-DNA testing is often conducted as part of a surname project where the goal is to test representatives of all the known lineages to determine how many different genetic families there are for the surname, and which variant spellings are related. There are more than 12,300 group projects indexed on the company's website. The 37-marker Y-DNA test is a good entry-level test, but advanced genealogists might want to consider the more comprehensive but much more expensive Big Y test.

If you've tested at AncestryDNA, 23andMe or MyHeritage, you can do a free atDNA transfer to add your results to FamilyTreeDNA's Family Finder database. Although the database is much smaller, you will benefit from a few additional tools. Males will receive a Y-DNA haplogroup report, although no matches.

An mtDNA test is also worth considering, but is best used for specific research scenarios.

BEST FOR
Taking a Y-DNA test from FamilyTreeDNA is the best option for researching surnames and exploring both recent and distant links on the direct male line.

LIVING DNA
livingdna.com, from £99

When Living DNA launched in 2016 it was the first company to offer biogeographical ancestry reports providing fine-scale regional breakdowns within Britain and Ireland. Although similar if not better results are now provided by AncestryDNA, genealogists might still be interested in an alternative representation of their ancestry.

Living DNA has a small matching database of about 500,000 people. I only have 449 matches at Living DNA compared with more than 18,000 at AncestryDNA, but there can be advantages to 'fishing in all the ponds'. For example, a friend's adoptee client had a match with a half-sibling at Living DNA who was not in any of the other databases.

There is only a limited range of tools for working with your matches, such as coloured dots for sorting and grouping them. You can message your matches, but there is currently no facility to build or link to a family tree, or provide a list of surnames of interest.

You can upload your DNA for free to get a list of DNA matches and a continental breakdown. You need to pay a fee of £20 if you want to access the chromosome browser and receive the regional and sub-regional breakdowns, along with the deep-ancestry Y-DNA and mtDNA reports.

BEST FOR
Living DNA is the only company based in the UK, and the best test for those worried about sending their DNA outside the security of the UK and the EU.

MYHERITAGE DNA
myheritage.com/dna, from £79

MyHeritage has a database of 9.7 million people, and is now effectively the second-largest genetic genealogy database. You will find matches at MyHeritage that aren't in any other database, particularly if you're looking for connections with relatives in continental Europe. It helps that the MyHeritage website is available in many different languages.

MyHeritage announced in October that it is transitioning to whole-genome sequencing for its DNA test, and is providing a low-coverage sequence at the same price as the old test. This opens up exciting possibilities for future developments, eg more accurate matches and improved reports into ancestral origins.

MyHeritage has a useful range of tools for working with matches. The Theory of Family Relativity tool will try to identify common ancestors, while its Chromosome Browser reveals which segments of DNA you share with your matches. There are filters and labels for searching and sorting your matches, too.

Sadly, MyHeritage stopped accepting uploads from other testing companies in August so you will need to test with the firm directly. A basic-level subscription is needed to view additional features such as the Shared Matches, the Theory of Family Relativity and the trees of your matches, or if you want to add more than 250 people to your online tree.

BEST FOR
MyHeritage sells the only genealogy test on the market using whole-genome sequencing, and the best test for making connections with relatives in continental Europe.

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WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

'My Family Includes A Bantam Commander And A Trans Pioneer'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

When John Schultz began researching his grandfather's First World War experiences, he had no idea of all the other extraordinary individuals he would go on to uncover, he tells **Claire Vaughan**

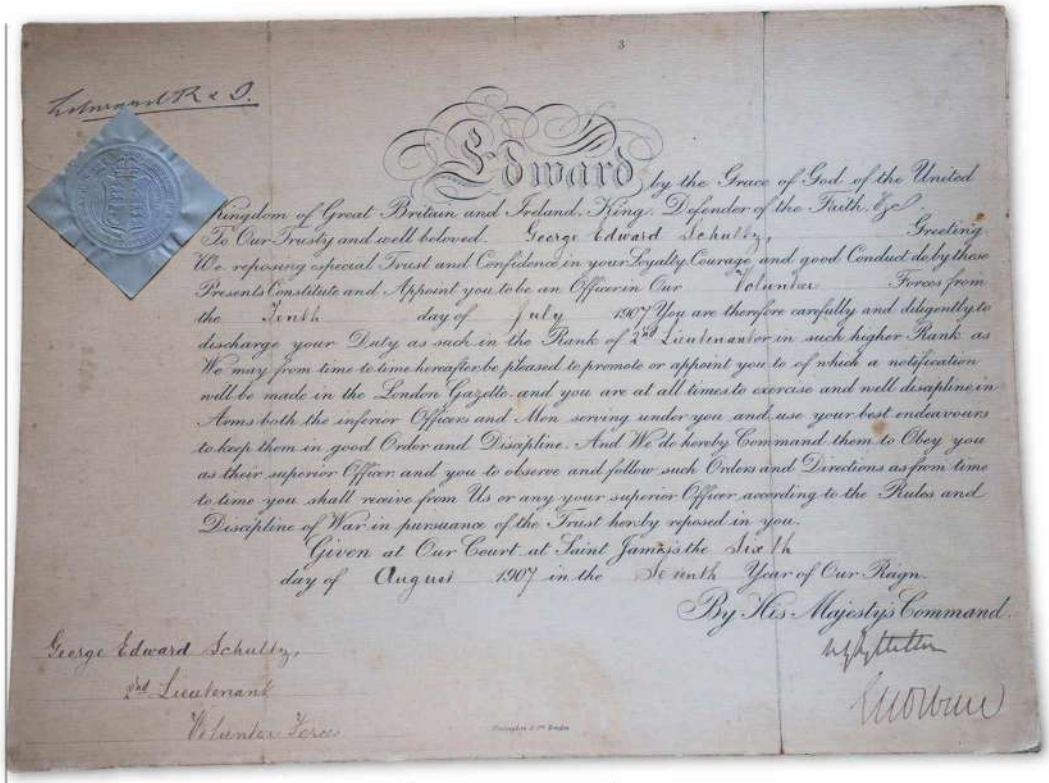
On Silverdale Road in Oxton, Birkenhead, Merseyside, a Victorian redbrick house with a sweeping gravel driveway and neat garden has a blue plaque outside that reads, "Captain George Edward Schultz (1887–1917) Company Commander 1st Birkenhead Bantam Battalion was born in this house. Served in the Cheshire Greys, Cheshire Territorial Force, and the Bantams. Died of his wounds in Picardy 19th August 1917."

George was the grandfather of John Schultz, who lives in Stockport, Greater Manchester. While digging into his family history he has discovered some courageous, adventurous and mould-breaking ancestors – as well as some individuals he's less than proud of.

"My interest in family history research was kindled when my first job in the mid-1970s took me, a southerner, to Merseyside, where my father had been born and brought up," he says, but it wasn't until around 2007 that he really got going with it.

George was the son of Arthur Schultz (1853–1903) and his wife Constance (née Leitch; 1856–1916). He spent his childhood in Scotland, but returned to Birkenhead, and emigrated to Canada in 1911.

"He volunteered in the equivalent of what today is the Army Reserve in Birkenhead before the First World War, and returned home from Canada on the outbreak of the war to serve in the Birkenhead Bantams. Bantam battalions catered for men who stood less than 5 feet 3 inches tall, so were precluded from enlisting in the regular Army."


Edward by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland King Defender of the Faith &c
To Our Trusty and well beloved George Edward Schultz Greeting
We reposing special Trust and Confidence in your Loyalty Courage and good Conduct do by these Presents Constitute and Appoint you to be an Officer in Our Volunteer Forces from the Tenth day of July 1907 You are therefore carefully and diligently to discharge your Duty as such in the Rank of 2nd Lieutenant in such higher Rank as We may from time to time hereafter be pleased to promote or appoint you to of which a notification will be made in the London Gazette and you are at all times to exercise and well discipline in Arms both the inferior Officers and Men serving under you and use your best endeavours to keep them in good Order and Discipline And We do hereby Command them to Obey you as their superior Officer and you to observe and follow such Orders and Directions as from time to time you shall receive from Us or any your superior Officer according to the Rules and Discipline of War in pursuance of the Trust hereby reposed in you.
Given at Our Court at Saint James's the Sixth day of August 1907 in the Seventh Year of Our Reign.
By His Majesty's Command
George Edward Schultz
2nd Lieutenant
Volunteer Force

George Edward Schultz received a commission to the rank of 2nd lieutenant in the Volunteer Force in 1907

Using Museums' Resources

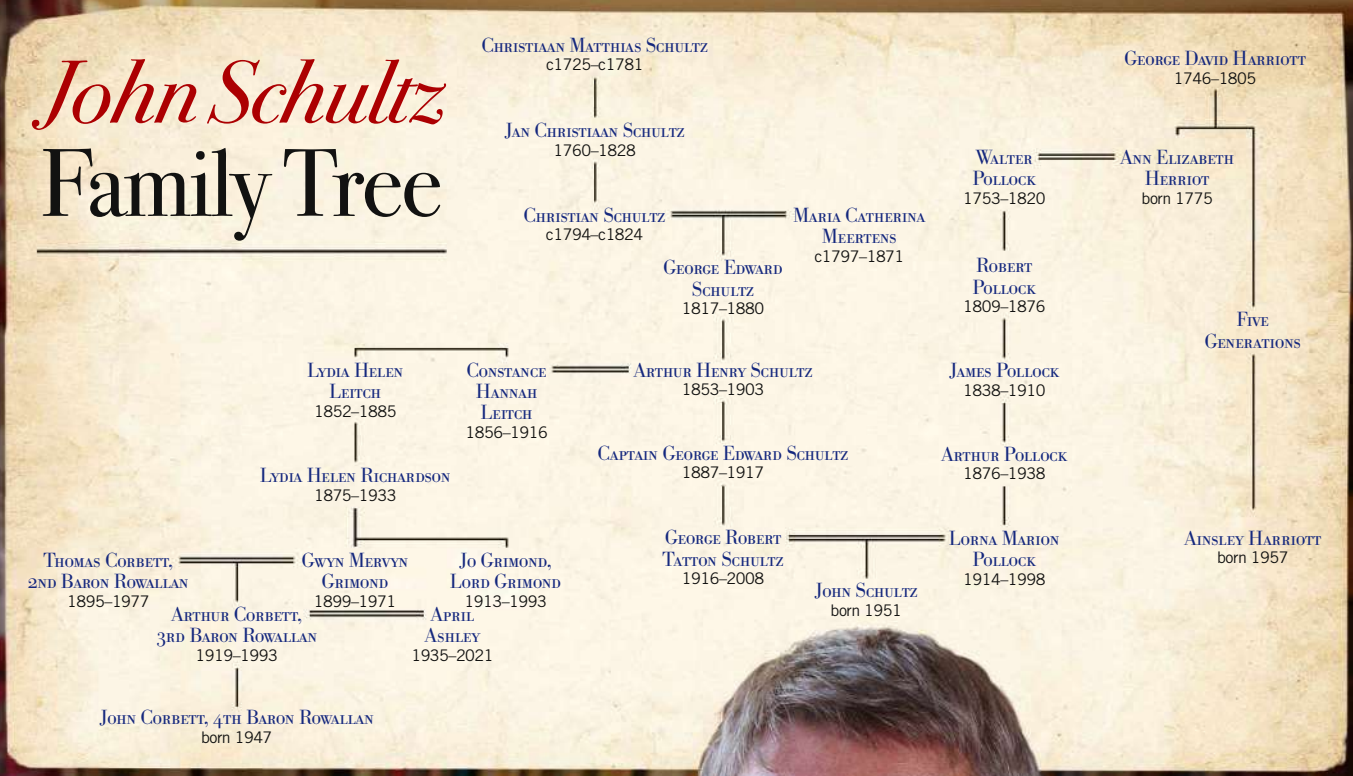
To supplement what he'd gleaned from George's service records, John headed to the Imperial War Museum in London (IWM; **iwm.org.uk/visits/iwm-london**) and the Cheshire Military Museum in Chester (**cheshiremilitarymuseum.org.uk**). Stephen McGreal's *Cheshire Bantams* (Pen & Sword, 2006) was also a useful read, as were the battalion's War Diaries at The National Archives at Kew (TNA; **nationalarchives.gov.uk**). These revealed the men's movements in the war. "George wrote the diary for five months – I recognised his handwriting!"

In IWM's Research Room, John read Harrison Johnston's *Extracts from an Officer's Diary, 1914–1918* (Geo. Falkner & Sons, 1919). "My grandfather was described in admiring and affectionate terms." Although George commanded a company in the first-ever battalion of men who didn't meet the Army's usual height requirement, neither he nor the other officers was short.

In 2017, John visited the First World War battlefields with his brother, and set about consolidating the information he had gathered. "I originally intended to produce a short magazine-style feature on his war records for the family. I uncovered so much information that it became a full-scale ▶

UNP/JON SUPER

John Schultz Family Tree



John holds a frame with photos of George Edward Schultz and his plaque, plus a portrait of George's grandfather who shared his name

▶ biography of 129 pages, which I had printed in book form."

His appetite for family research whetted, John headed back further on his Schultz line. "Intriguingly, the 1841 census showed that my great great grandfather, also George Schultz (1817–1880), had been born in 'foreign parts'. In 1851, the census recorded his place of birth as Demerara, which is now part of Guyana on the northern coast of South America."

Newly Discovered Cousin

Searching online, John found a site containing details of British colonists in South America. "The site owner told me someone else called John Schultz had been in touch." It turned out to be a fourth cousin from Canada. John made contact, and the two swapped notes. The Canadian researcher had unearthed information on their Schultz ancestors, including a Christiaan Matthias Schultz (c1725–c1781): John's 5x great grandfather. "He had learnt of Christiaan's move to the Caribbean island of Sint Eustatius, and that his children moved to Demerara. However, he had left lots of loose ends."

From Dutch texts he found via Google Books and managed to translate, John discovered that Christiaan had been born in Danzig (now Gdańsk), at that time part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, but now in northern Poland.

A sea captain, Christiaan had then lived in Amsterdam, where he married. John found his forebear's exploits described in the High Court of the Admiralty's Prize Court Papers at TNA, which record the capture of enemy or neutral vessels in wartime. "In 1759, the Dutch ship he was captaining *Der Snip (The Snipe)* and its cargo was captured by English privateers in the English Channel. Handling the documents was a memorable experience."

Christiaan then moved to Sint Eustatius. "The island was very famous at the time as a supply route for the rebel American colonists during the War of Independence (1775–1783)."

Christiaan's son and John's 4x great grandfather was Jan Christiaan Schultz (1760–1828) and John's 3x great grandfather was Christian Schultz (c1794–c1824), both of whom lived in Demerara. "Starting with the records already unearthed by my fourth cousin, I built up a detailed picture of the family's positions, actions and plantations there."

With many primary sources for British Guiana untraceable, John used other resources such as transcripts and images on the website Guyana Colonial Newspapers (**vc.id.au/edg**), the British Guiana Colonists Index (**vc.id.au/tb**), and old maps held by the Guyana/British Guiana Genealogical Society (**gbggs.org**) and on the website of the Norman B Leventhal Map & Education Center in Boston, Massachusetts, USA (**leventhalmap.org/**).

Jan, two of his sisters and his son, Christian, all married into plantation-owning families, with enslaved people working on their land. John became engrossed in researching "what is a distressing, but at the same time fascinating period in my family's history".

In 1834, leaving British Guiana after slavery was abolished in the British Empire, Christian's widow Maria (née Meertens; c1797–1871) settled in Gloucestershire with her son George, John's great great grandfather. "Maria's second husband had won £6 million at today's values in a Chancery Court inheritance case, and was able to buy a mansion in Cheltenham for the family with the proceeds. But Maria later lost most of the money defending six Chancery Court cases."

Her life is well documented, with records of her court cases at TNA, articles in local newspapers, and letters from Maria to her son in Canada. Eventually the financial strain was too much, not least because the fraudulent claimants failed to pay her costs, and she had to sell the mansion.

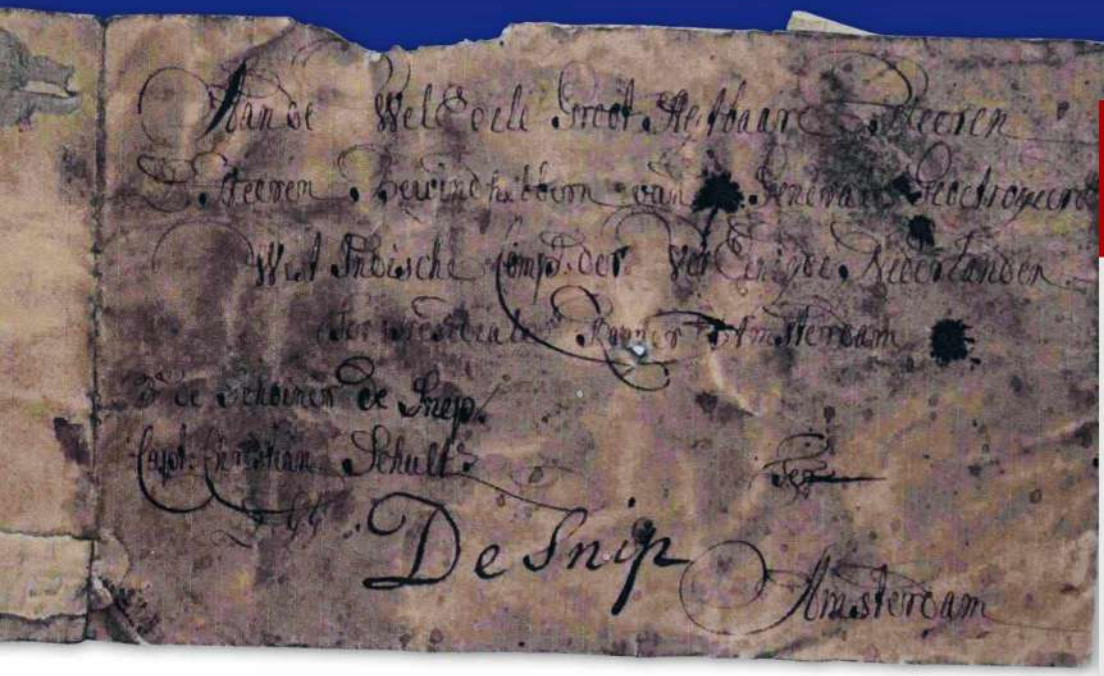
The Schultzes weren't the only slave-owning family in John's family tree, however. He also uncovered plantation owners on his mother's Pollock line.

The ship Christiaan was captaining was captured by English privateers

TNA's record of the capture of *Der Snip*, Christiaan Matthias Schultz's ship

John's grandfather George Edward Schultz gave this locket to his wife, John's grandmother Rose Tatton Schultz – the back bears her initials

UNP/JON SUPER



"My great uncle had written a family history in 1939 that included Walter Pollock and George Harriott." John found Walter (1753–1820), his 3x great grandfather, and George (1746–1805), his 4x great grandfather, listed as plantation owners in Jamaica in the online database created by University College London's Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery (**ucl.ac.uk/lbs/**). He then used an 1804 map of Jamaica on the National Library of Scotland's site **maps.nls.uk** to locate Walter's plantation, plus an 1817 slave register from St Mary Parish, Jamaica, preserved by TNA among the records of the Office of Registry of Colonial Slaves and Slave Compensation Commission.

Quadroon Offspring

"Walter Pollock was a *busha* (overseer) at one estate in Jamaica before he became the owner of two other estates. While an overseer, he had at least one child with a slave mother; the child was recorded as a quadroon (one quarter black). He later purchased the freedom for his children and grandchildren," says John, who is in contact with a distant relative descended from slaves.

Ainsley Harriott's 2008 episode of *Who Do You Think You Are?* provided another piece of the jigsaw. John was amazed to discover that he is related to the TV chef, since they are both descended from George Harriott, the father of Walter's wife, Ann Elizabeth Herriot (born 1775).

But there were more surprises among the family of John's great grandmother, Constance Hannah Leitch (1856–1916). "One of the lines on her branch led to the Grimond family. Jo – later Lord – Grimond (1913–1993) was leader of the Liberal Party between 1956 and 1967, and my father's second cousin. Gwyn, one of Jo's sisters, married Thomas Corbett, 2nd Baron Rowallan (1895–1977).

"Thomas served in both world wars, earning the Military Cross, was Chief Scout (1945–1959), and governed Tasmania (1959–1963). He raised a Territorial Army battalion in 1939, and a Rowallan Company was formed at Sandhurst in 1977."

His son, Arthur (1919–1993), the 3rd Baron Rowallan and John's third cousin, married model and actor April Ashley (1935–2021) in 1963.

"April was born male, served as a sailor in the Merchant Navy and underwent a gender-reassignment operation in Morocco. David Bailey photographed her for a lingerie advert in *Vogue*, and she appeared in a film with Bob Hope and Bing Crosby."

The marriage broke down, and in 1970 Arthur persuaded the courts to annul it on the grounds that it was not possible to legally change sex. "The case (Corbett vs Corbett) remained the basis of gender-change law until the 2004 Gender Recognition Act."

John has greatly enjoyed researching his family, as well as writing about and memorialising them. In fact, it was his biography *The Road to the Knoll: The Life of Captain George Edward Schultz of the Birkenhead Bantams* (2019) – hailed as "One of the very best of the family memorial volumes published during the centenary years of the Great War" by The Western Front Association (**www.westernfrontassociation.com**) – that led to the plaque being erected on Silverdale Road for all to see.

Tell your story

Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

Resources

These resources helped John research his relations' lives

Chancery Court Records

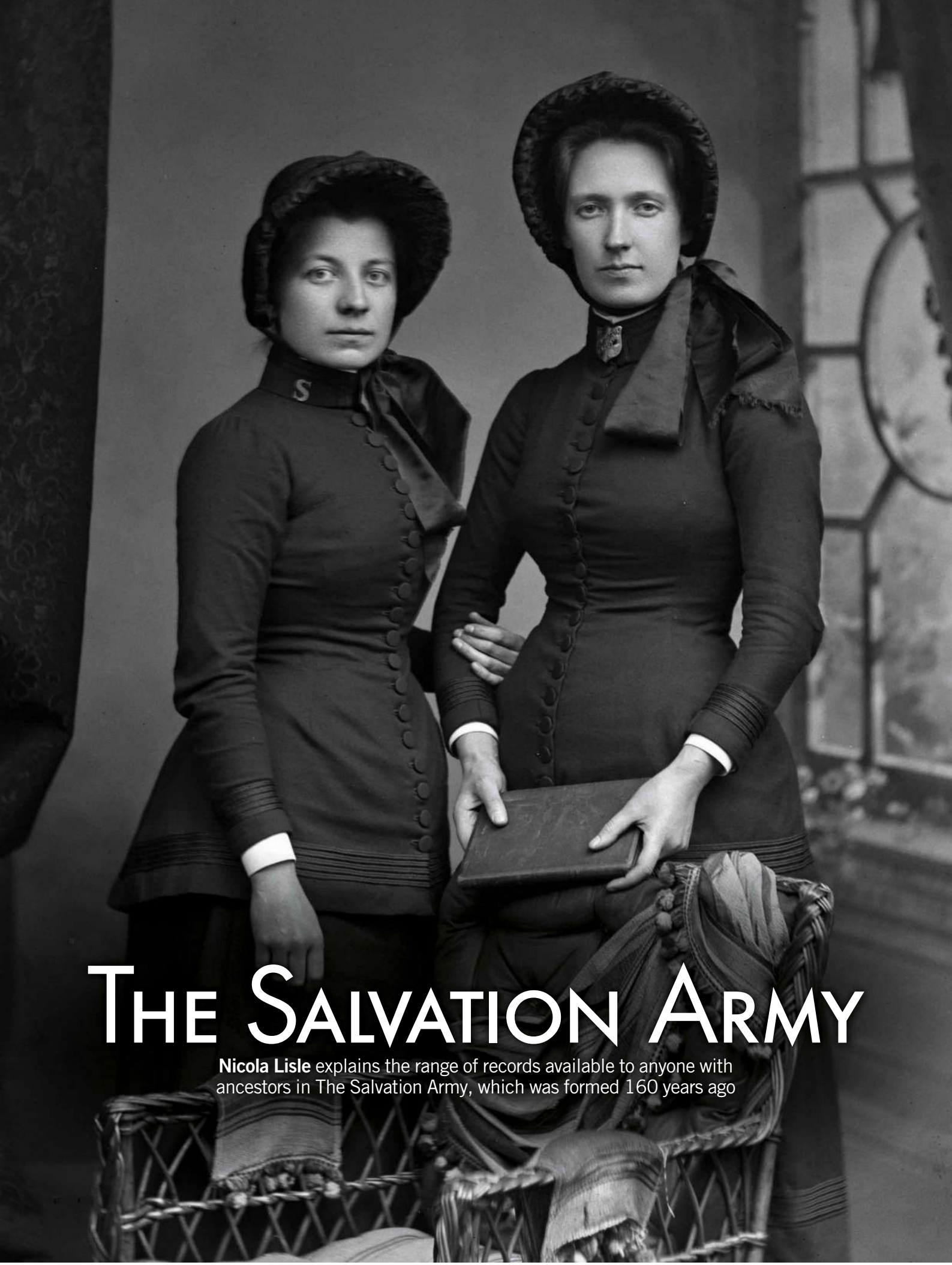
In The National Archives at Kew (TNA) John found documents from numerous Chancery Court cases revealing that Maria Schultz had to fight claims, including by her sons and third husband, to portions of her inheritance. The research guide 'Civil Court Cases: Chancery Equity Suits 1558–1875' is a must: **bit.ly/tna-guide-chancery**.

Old Maps

The website of the Norman B Leventhal Map & Education Center, Boston, Massachusetts, USA, has a free collection of more than 250,000 digitised maps: **leventhalmap.org**. John consulted the site to make sense of his forebears' land holdings in Demerara and Jamaica.

War Diaries and Battalion Operation Orders

First World War unit War Diaries are held by TNA in series WO 95 and described in its online catalogue Discovery (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C14303**). Many are available digitally. Handwritten battalion operation orders were issued by commanders to subordinate units, and may be attached as appendices to the relevant diary.



The Salvation Army

Nicola Lisle explains the range of records available to anyone with ancestors in The Salvation Army, which was formed 160 years ago

The Salvation Army was formally established on 2 July 1865 by former Methodist lay preacher William Booth and his wife Catherine, in response to the widespread poverty, homelessness, disease, addiction and crime that they encountered in the East End of London.

After breaking away from the Methodist Church in 1861, the Booths had taken to the streets as itinerant preachers in the hope of providing spiritual and practical help to those living in extreme deprivation.

Preaching in the open air proved effective in attracting audiences. After preaching outside the Blind Beggar public house in Whitechapel, in June 1865, William was invited to take weekly services in a tent at a former Quaker burial ground nearby. The first service was held on 2 July the same year, and led to the establishment of the East London Christian Mission. The mission acquired its first headquarters at 220 Whitechapel Road in 1867, moving to a covered market in the same road three years later, which was accordingly renamed the People's Mission Hall.

In May 1878, with the movement now rapidly expanding beyond the East End, it was renamed The Salvation Army, a name that was felt to more accurately reflect its wider geographic reach as well as its message of hope and salvation.

The change of name brought with it a new, quasi-military structure, with the introduction of a new uniform, the use of military terminology, and the playing of brass bands at open-air services. The new organisation was headed by a general – with William serving as the first holder of the position until his death in 1912 – and its leading evangelists became known as officers, those training to become officers as cadets, and ordinary members as soldiers. Individual missions became known as 'corps'. Justifying the change of name, Booth described the organisation as one in which "a number of people joined together after the fashion of an army; and an army for the purpose of carrying Salvation through the land".

Social Work

An important part of The Salvation Army's mission was its social work. The first women's refuge opened in Whitechapel in 1884, followed soon after by a refuge for men at Limehouse together with a hospital for unmarried mothers, all offering the care and support needed to help their charges turn their lives around and find employment. More refuges were soon established in other major cities in the UK, and eventually across the globe. Care homes for the elderly and shelters for ex-prisoners followed during the early years of the 20th century, and during both world wars The Salvation Army offered support for the troops, including working in field hospitals and canteens, and holding concerts at prisoner-of-war camps.

The People's Mission Hall on Whitechapel Road in East London

Expert Picks

Nicola recommends these online resources for Salvation Army forebears

British Newspaper Archive

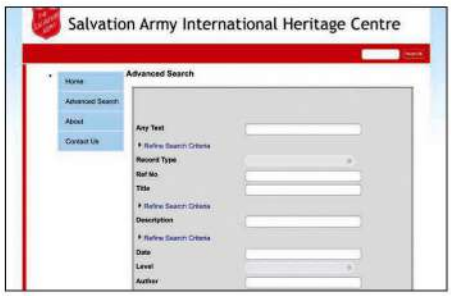
w **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**

Select a date range and search this massive archive for local and national Salvation Army news and obituaries.

Discovery

w **tinyurl.com/disco-salvation**

TNA's catalogue explains records held here and in local archives, like diaries, pamphlets, correspondence and soldiers' rolls.



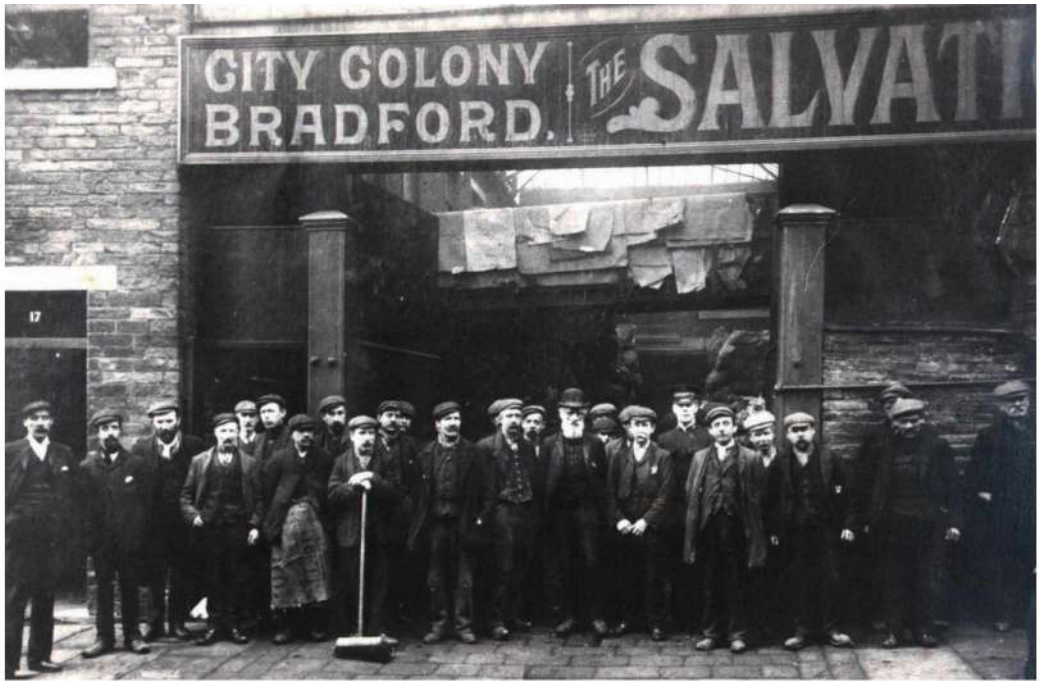
The Salvation Army International Heritage Centre

w **tinyurl.com/calmview-salv-army**

The centre's online catalogue is a must, but note that it doesn't include every item it holds.

GETTY IMAGES | THE SALVATION ARMY INTERNATIONAL HERITAGE CENTRE

William also fought for workers' rights. In 1888, women's-rights activist Annie Besant led the famous match girls' strike at Bryant & May Match Factory in Bow in protest at the use of white phosphorous in the match-making process. This deadly ingredient caused the infamous 'phossy jaw' – a painful condition leading to abscesses, tooth decay, facial disfigurement and sometimes brain damage. In response, William opened his own match-making factory in East London in 1891, using only the non-toxic red phosphorous while also improving general standards of hygiene and working practices. Bryant & May switched to a safer alternative in 1901, and the use of white phosphorous was finally banned in 1910.



One of The Salvation Army's many City Colonies, which provided food, accommodation and other support

Accessing Records

The archive at The Salvation Army International Heritage Centre (IHC; **salvationarmy.org.uk/about-us/international-heritage-centre/contact-international-heritage-centre**) in Champion Park, South-East London, holds detailed records for officers and cadets, as well as some relating to soldiers. Unfortunately, a substantial number of records were destroyed during the Blitz in 1941, but many more survived so there is a good chance of finding something here relating to your Salvation Army ancestor.

The IHC holds a complete set of records for officers trained at William Booth College, the army's international training college, covering 1905–2000 for men and 1914–2000 for women. There are two registers – one arranged alphabetically by surname (WBC/2/1), and one arranged chronologically by training sessions (WBC/2/2). Both registers include detailed information about each cadet, such as full name, date of birth, roll number, corps at which the cadet served as a soldier before entering training, date they entered training, previous occupation, other skills (such as speaking a foreign language or playing a musical instrument), date commissioned, and rank given on commissioning.

After completing their training, some cadets were appointed sergeants and stayed at the college so they could train the next intake of cadets. The archive includes a list of sergeants from 1899–1947 (WBC/2/4).

Career cards for officers

William Booth 1829–1912

The visionary preacher founded The Salvation Army with his wife Catherine

Born in Nottingham into an Anglican family, William Booth was drawn to Methodism as a teenager, becoming a lay preacher at the age of 17 while working as a pawnbroker's apprentice to support his widowed mother and two sisters.

In 1849 William moved to London, where he worked in pawnbroking before giving it up to focus on lay preaching. It was while preaching at Binfield Road Chapel, Clapham, in 1852 that he met Catherine Mumford (born 1829), the only daughter of Methodist lay preacher John Mumford and his wife, Sarah.

Catherine was an eloquent and pioneering preacher, whose pamphlet *Female Ministry: Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel* was published in 1859 and can be freely downloaded via Google Books at **tinyurl.com/books-google-female-ministry**. She became a major influence on the development of William's mission, leading to her being dubbed 'Mother of the Salvation Army'.

They married in 1855, and worked as itinerant preachers before returning to London in 1865. There they formed a Christian Mission in Whitechapel, which eventually developed into The Salvation Army. Their eight children were involved in the organisation, two of them as generals like William.

Catherine died of cancer in 1890, and was buried at Abney Park Cemetery, Stoke Newington.

On William's death in 1912, he lay in state at the Salvation Army Congress Hall, Clapton, before a memorial service at Olympia with 35,000 mourners. He was buried in Abney Park Cemetery alongside his wife.

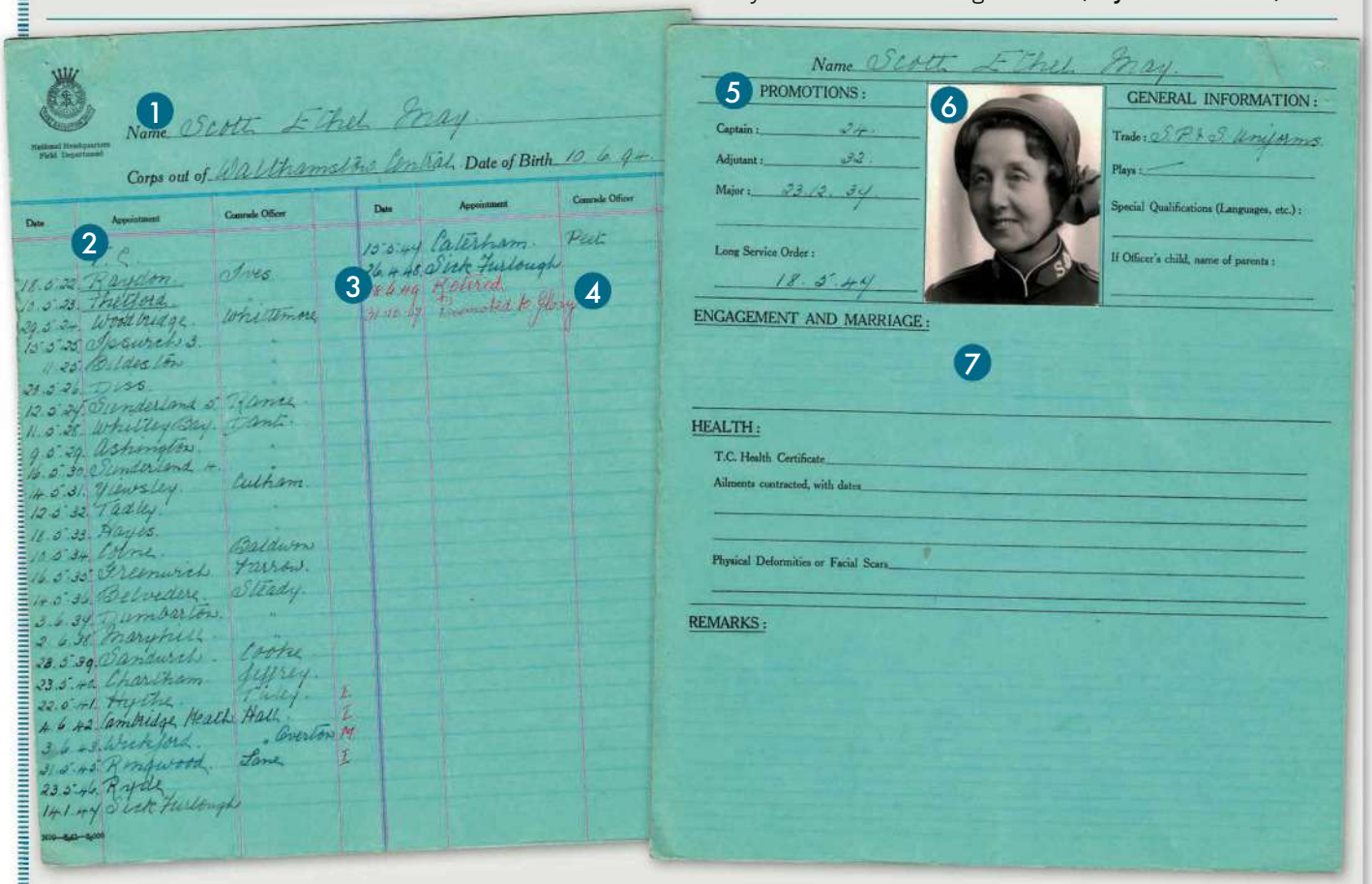
DID YOU KNOW?

Music-making has always been central to The Salvation Army's spiritual outreach and community work, and from 1893 it manufactured its own brass instruments.

THE SALVATION ARMY INTERNATIONAL HERITAGE CENTRE

Career Card

This two-sided record for Major Ethel Scott is preserved by The Salvation Army International Heritage Centre (**tinyurl.com/sa-ihc**)



1 Personal Details

We can see that Ethel May Scott was born on 10 June 1894, and joined the National Headquarters Field Department from the Walthamstow Central corps.

2 Appointments

Ethel's first posting was to Raydon on 18 May 1922, just three weeks short of her 28th birthday. A Salvation Army Hall was founded at Raydon, Suffolk, in 1920, so Ethel was one of its early recruits.

3 Retirement

Ethel retired on 18 June 1949, aged 55, after serving for 27 years.

4 Promoted To Glory

Ethel passed away on 31 October 1967, when she was 73 years old.

5 Promotions

The list of promotions shows Ethel's gradual rise through the ranks to major, to which she was appointed on 23 December 1934. Note that she was also awarded a Long Service Order on 18 May 1947, just two years before she retired.

6 Photograph

Not all career cards have photos, but this one includes a headshot of Ethel.

7 Other Details

From the blank spaces we can assume that Ethel never married or had children, and enjoyed good health throughout her career.

who served in the UK and Ireland Territory during the 20th century also hold detailed information (see the annotated document). These are arranged alphabetically by surname within each of four territorial or social-service departments – the Field Department (FD/1) oversaw officers in charge of local corps, the Staff Department (STF/1) managed officers working in the Territorial Headquarters and Divisional Headquarters, and the men's and women's Social Services Headquarters (WSW/1 and MSW/1) oversaw officers working in social centres. Dates of appointments and promotions are included, plus additional personal details. Some of them have photographs attached too.

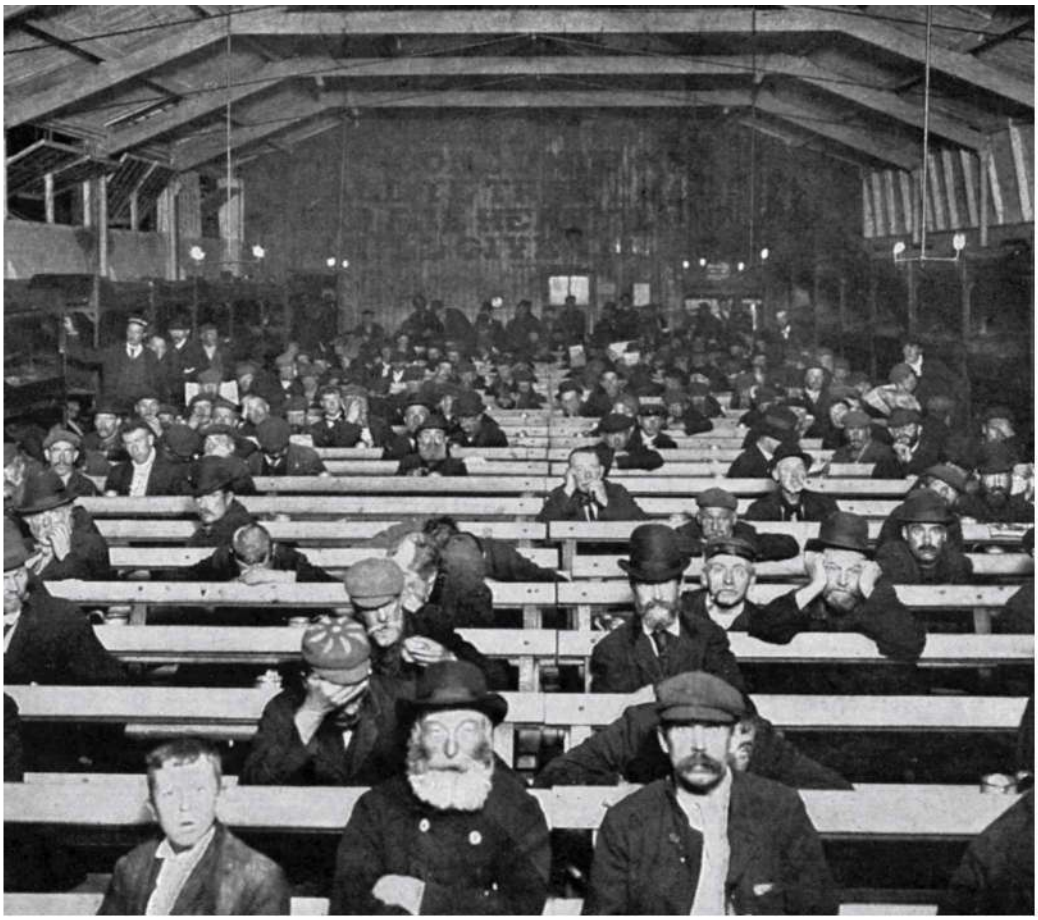
For married couples, details are recorded on joint cards under the husband's name. The wife's maiden name is mentioned, together with details of any children.

If an officer retired before 1941, their career card is likely to have been one of those destroyed in the Blitz, but if their service continued beyond 1941 then a card will have been reconstructed using other sources.

The centre also holds career cards, officer files and international leaders' files for those who served with the International Headquarters at 101 Queen Victoria Street, London, during the 20th century, as well as some for those who served in International Territories.

Tracing Officers

Another very useful source is the lists of staff and field changes published monthly in the periodical called ▶



A Salvation Army homeless shelter in Blackfriars, Central London, photographed in the early 20th century

▶ *The Officer/The Field Officer* (1893–1913). These lists are helpful in tracing the location, rank and appointment of officers during this period, and can be accessed digitally on the IHC's website: **salvationarmy.org.uk/about-us/international-heritage-centre/international-heritage-centre-resources/digital-collections/the-officer.**

The IHC also holds burial records, personal papers, photographs and other periodicals. The yearbooks are particularly useful, because they include 'Who's Who' lists for officers on active service, details of retired officers, and lists of 'Promotions to Glory', the term that the organisation used for the deaths of its members. The latter include date of birth, date of death, address, rank, length of service, and place of burial.

Free Research Guides

The IHC's guide to officer records, available from the website as a downloadable PDF, is essential reading for anyone researching a forebear who served; this and other research guides are available from **salvationarmy.org.uk/about-us/international-heritage-centre/international-heritage-centre-resources/subject-guides.** In addition to giving detailed guidance on tracing officers and cadets who served in the UK, there are also lists of overseas territories, which hold their own records.

Records of soldiers are more limited. The IHC preserves some soldiers' rolls for closed (discontinued) corps, with details including name, roll-book number, address, marital status and date of enrolment, but many are held in local county archives/record offices or by individual corps. To trace a soldier ancestor, you need to know the name of his or her corps so that the IHC can check their records.

Finally, the IHC also holds records for those helped by the various Salvation Army institutions, and some, particularly those for women, are quite substantial. However, the sensitive nature of these records means that many are closed for 75 years, in some cases 100 years.

TOP TIP!

If you know where your relation served, check the local archive. You could find soldiers' rolls, periodicals, photos, oral histories, books and records of local events.

NICOLA LISLE has written articles for various family history magazines, two books about family history, and a history of dolls' houses

Resources

Take your research further

ARCHIVES

The National Archives

a **Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU**
t 020 8876 3444
w **nationalarchives.gov.uk**

TNA has a range of material from the army, eg photos, pamphlets, soldiers' rolls, family papers and diaries.

The Salvation Army International Heritage Centre

a **William Booth College, Champion Park, London SE5 8BQ**
t 020 7326 7800
e *heritage@salvationarmy.org.uk*
w **salvationarmy.org.uk**

Here you'll find The Salvation Army's museum, reference library and archive. Online resources include guides and digital collections.

BOOK

The Salvation Army
Susan Cohen
Shire Publications, 2013

This is a good overview of the organisation's history.

MUSEUM

William Booth Birthplace Museum

a **Notintone Place, Sneinton, Nottingham NG2 4QG**
t 0115 979 3464
e *wbbm@salvationarmy.org.uk*
w **salvationarmy.org.uk/about-us/international-heritage-centre/william-booth-birthplace-museum**

Find out more about the Booths and the birth of The Salvation Army. The museum has been closed for refurbishment, but is due to reopen to the public in December, Tuesday to Thursday by appointment.

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Orphans celebrate Christmas at a Barnardo's home in Haslemere, Surrey

Orphanages And Children's Homes

These institutions often leave behind name-rich sources, writes **Jonathan Scott**

One of the first institutions to care for impoverished children was Bridewell Palace, given to the City of London in 1553 by Edward VI. London's famous Foundling Hospital was established in 1739 to care for abandoned infants. More philanthropically funded homes began to appear, although many orphaned or abandoned children ended up in workhouses or other Poor Law institutions. By the later 19th century courts could also send juvenile offenders to charitably run reformatory schools.

The term 'children's homes' therefore covers everything from orphanages run by churches, charities or local authorities, to religious houses and reformatories, and archival material from such institutions doesn't always survive. Potential sources vary from admission and discharge registers, which list names, dates, ages, and sometimes reasons for admission, to detailed case files, which may contain family background, notes on health, and correspondence. However, do keep in mind that children's records are often closed for 75–100 years to protect privacy.

FOUNDLING HOSPITAL ARCHIVE

w **https://archives.coram.org.uk**

Sea captain Thomas Coram campaigned for 17 years to bring the Foundling Hospital into existence. George II eventually signed its charter in October 1739, and a temporary house that could accommodate 30 children opened in Hatton Garden, Central London, 18 months later. On the website of the charity Coram, the hospital's modern incarnation, you can explore an archive that spans the entire history of the institution, up to 1954 when the residential school closed. So far some 405 volumes from 1739–1899 have been digitised and transcribed. This totals about 100,000 pages and represents a quarter of the entire archive. You can search by name, browse the admission registers, or explore the database by foundling numbers 1 to 22,031.

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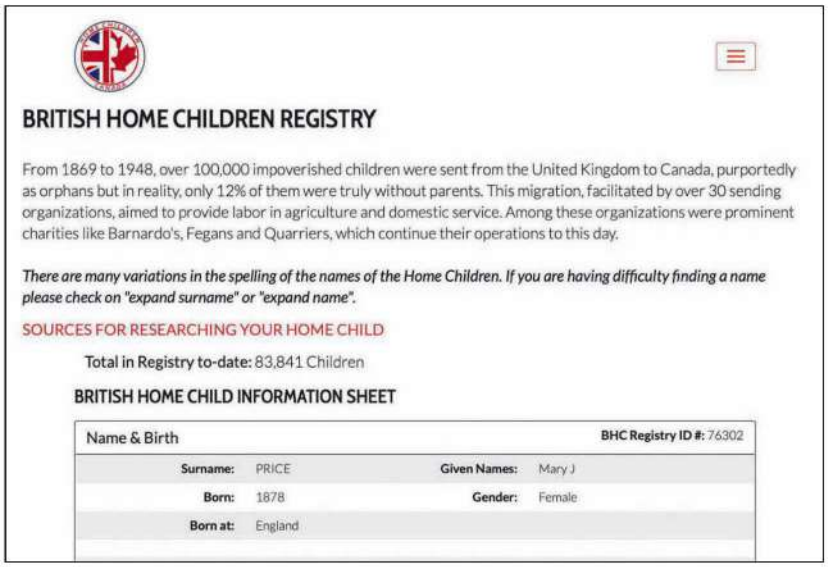
BEST WEBSITES



BRITISH HOME CHILDREN REGISTRY

From 1869 to 1948, over 100,000 impoverished children were sent from the United Kingdom to Canada, purportedly as orphans but in reality, only 12% of them were truly without parents. This migration, facilitated by over 30 sending organizations, aimed to provide labor in agriculture and domestic service. Among these organizations were prominent charities like Barnardo's, Fegans and Quarriers, which continue their operations to this day.

There are many variations in the spelling of the names of the Home Children. If you are having difficulty finding a name please check on "expand surname" or "expand name".

SOURCES FOR RESEARCHING YOUR HOME CHILD

Total in Registry to-date: 83,841 Children

BRITISH HOME CHILD INFORMATION SHEET

Name & Birth			BHC Registry ID #: 76302
Surname:	PRICE	Given Names:	Mary J
Born:	1878	Gender:	Female
Born at:	England		

BRITISH HOME CHILDREN REGISTRY

w **homechildrencanada.com/registry**

Severe poverty and overcrowding meant that many reformers and charities believed in sending children overseas. Despite the desire to give children a fresh start, training them up as agricultural workers or domestic servants, the system could be cruel and abusive. On the website of Canadian charity Home Children Canada you'll find the British Home Children Registry, a database of almost 84,000 children sent to the country between 1869 and 1948. Although the children were purportedly orphans, it's estimated that only 12 per cent had actually lost both their parents. Their migration was arranged by more than 30 organisations, including charities such as Barnardo's.

MANCHESTER ANCESTORS

w **mlfhs.uk**

If you've found the home where your ancestor was cared for, it's definitely worth checking if the local genealogical group has transcribed or indexed any relevant records. The Manchester & Lancashire Family History Society, as an example, has run several projects relevant to this topic, although you'll have to join to access the material online. Members have indexed Bolton Workhouse creed books – which recorded the religion of those admitted – as well as admissions to schools for the blind and deaf, and the 5,853 children who passed through the doors of the predecessors of the Together Trust, a charity that still survives today, between 1870 and 1919.

Expert's Choice

Peter Higginbotham is the author of *Children's Homes* (Pen & Sword, 2017)

A view of London's Foundling Hospital from 1751

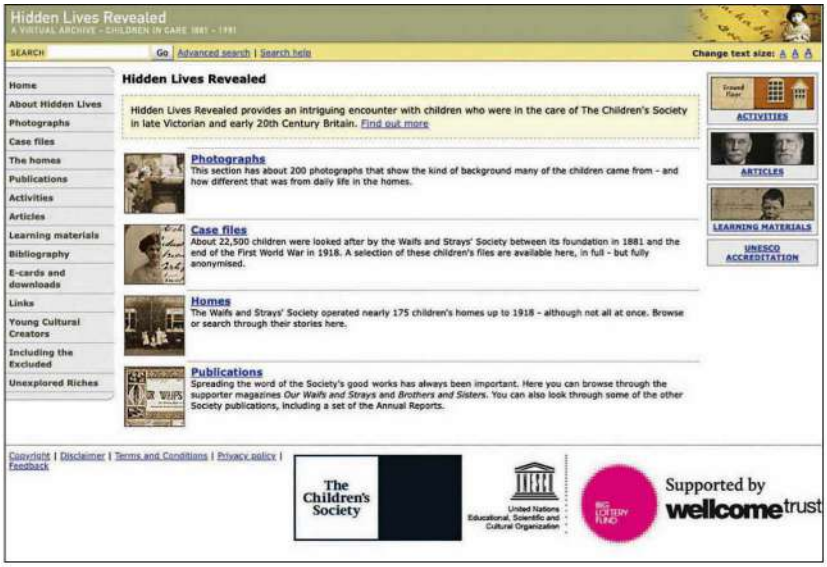
My website Children's Homes **childrenshomes.org.uk** documents the story of the many and varied establishments that housed children, from institutions such as London's Foundling Hospital, founded in 1739, up until the latter part of the 20th century. The site's coverage ranges from those run by the workhouse authorities, local councils, religious bodies, and charities such as Barnardo's, through to those catering for more specific groups such as children who were deaf or blind, or who had fallen foul of the law.

A common problem for family historians researching a children's home is identifying the particular establishment involved, of which the website lists almost 9,000 in England and Wales alone. To help in this, the site provides two main lines of approach.

First, listing all of the homes geographically – county by county, and then town by town. This may help if, for example, a now elderly former inmate of a home can only recall that it was in the Coventry area. Many of the pages for individual homes also include photos that might help to jog memories. Some homes beyond the UK and Ireland are also covered. Where known, the surviving records for each individual home are detailed.

The second option is the listing of homes under more than 40 thematic headings, such as the authority, charity, religious body or occupational group that ran them, or their particular target group, such as children with various disabilities or girls who were felt to be in moral danger. The 'All About…' dropdown in the panel on the left-hand side provides extensive background information on these groups and themes.

GETTY IMAGES



HIDDEN LIVES REVEALED

w **hiddenlives.org.uk**

Hidden Lives is based around the archives of the Children's Society (originally the Waifs and Strays' Society), a major provider of children's homes in Britain – some 22,500 children were cared for by the society between its founding in 1881 and the end of the First World War. Here you can read 150 anonymised case files and find out more about the homes themselves, which varied from rural cottage homes to much larger urban institutions. In the 'Publications' section you can read back issues of the society's magazines *Our Waifs and Strays*, for adult supporters, and *Brothers and Sisters*, produced for members of The Children's Union – a club for young supporters.

FORMER CHILDREN'S HOMES

w **formerchildrenshomes.org.uk**

There's some very useful content on this website, if you're prepared to dig for it – the design is quite trying, with intrusive advertisements. As well as information about different institutions, you'll find reminiscences from former pupils, some of which are harrowing. If you're researching a particular home, you can use the Google search box, or browse different kinds of institution arranged by county. Cottage homes, for example, were generally built by Poor Law unions to take children out of the workhouse. Meanwhile open-air schools were intended for children who were recovering from illness, or had long-term conditions.

GO FURTHER

Nine more sites for researching your ancestors

BARNARDO'S

w **barnardos.org.uk/former-barnardos-children**

Get advice for tracing Barnardo's children.

CHILD MIGRANTS TRUST

w **childmigrantstrust.org**

Find out more about forced child migration.

FINDMYPAST

w **bit.ly/fmp-derb-orph**

Findmypast has the collection 'Derbyshire, Derby Railway Servants' Orphanage Registers, 1875–1912', plus various Home Children records.

FOUNDLING MUSEUM

w **foundlingmuseum.org.uk**

Learn about Coram's Foundling Hospital.

HISTORIC HOSPITAL ADMISSION REGISTERS PROJECT (HHARP)

w **hharp.org**

This site has data from the archives of various children's hospitals in London and Glasgow.

HULL'S CHILDREN'S HOMES

w **hullhistorycentre.org.uk/research/research-guides/childrens-homes.aspx**

The Hull History Centre's site describes which records survive from the city's children's homes.

RAGGED SCHOOL MUSEUM

w **raggedschoolmuseum.org.uk**

London's largest Victorian ragged school was opened by Dr Barnardo in 1877.

SURREY HISTORY CENTRE

w **https://www.surreyarchives.org.uk/collections/getrecord/SHCOL_6129**

You have to visit in person to see the archives, but this page describes the history and records of orphanages in Surrey.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

w **nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/children-care/**

TNA's guide to researching children in care details the mechanics of the system, and the kinds of records that survive.

Royal Navy Quota Acts

Paul Blake explains how a system introduced in the late 18th century recruited many men to the Navy

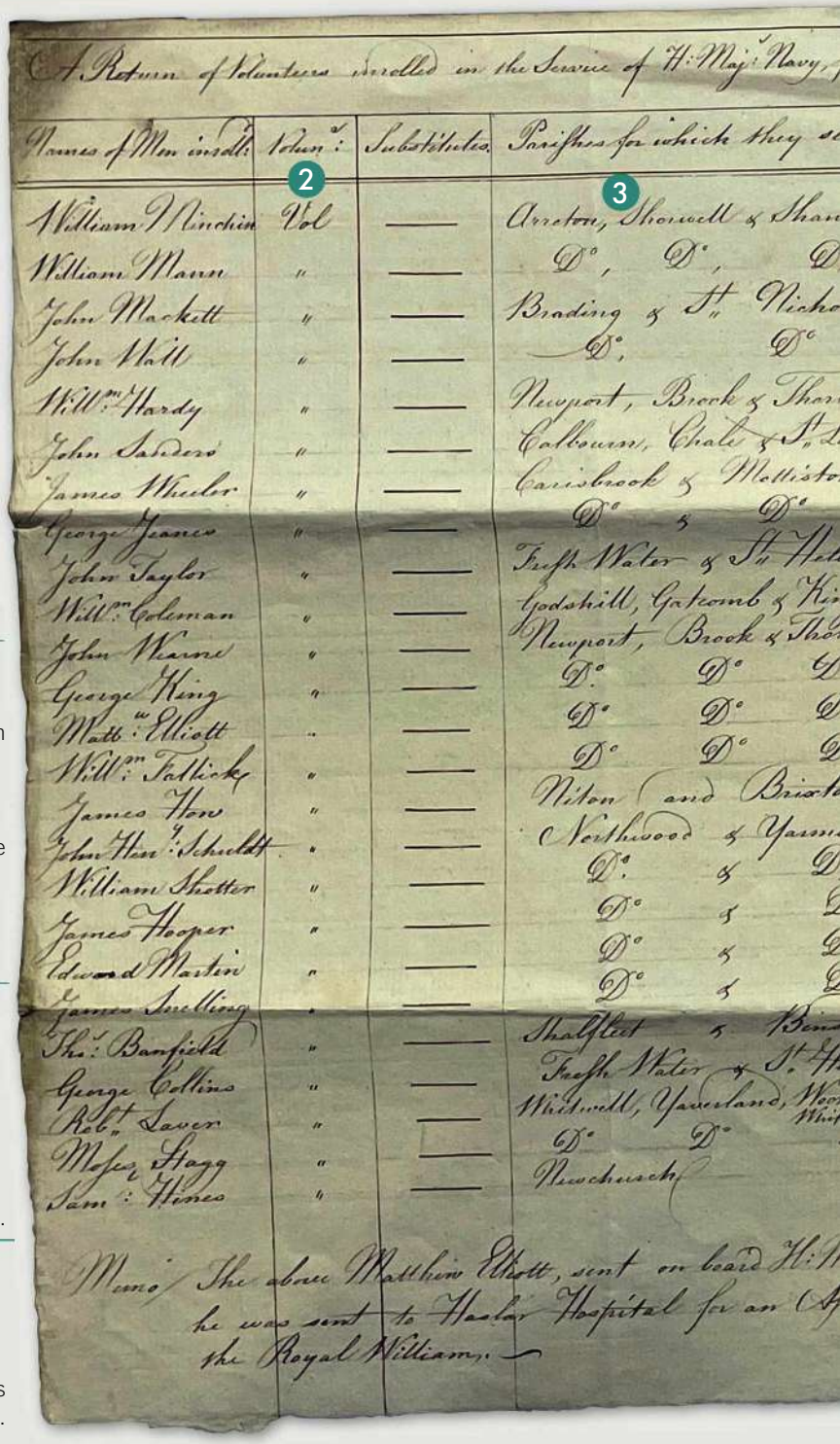
Britain's war with France, which commenced in 1793, resulted in a significant demand for soldiers, marines and seamen. In January, the requirement for the Royal Navy was set at 25,000 men, later increased by Parliament to 45,000, a goal reached primarily through the efforts of the Impress Service (press gangs). By January 1794, the demand had risen to 85,000 men, a figure that was met with considerable difficulty. Twelve months later, the number required was further increased to 100,000 men, prompting urgent action to raise this huge number.

As the availability of seamen diminished, William Pitt the Younger, the prime minister, sought to recruit from among non-seamen, or 'landsmen' as they were generally known, through the introduction of several Quota Acts in March and April 1795. Additional Acts passed in 1796 and 1797 served the same function. Impressment persisted despite its known failings, with a focus on recruiting experienced but unemployed seamen around the seaports.

Filling The Quota

These Acts assigned counties, towns and cities with the responsibility of providing additional 'quota men' for the manning of the fleet – mainly men who were not born to the sea, chosen by men totally inexperienced in such a task. While these recruits were theoretically volunteers, local authorities on occasion used the opportunity for disposing of local delinquents or those considered undesirable. ▶

Volunteers' List, 1795



1 Royal William
The heading reveals that the 'volunteers' were sent on board HMS *Royal William* on 3 April 1795.

2 Name
The first three columns record the name of each man, and note whether or not he was sent as a substitute.

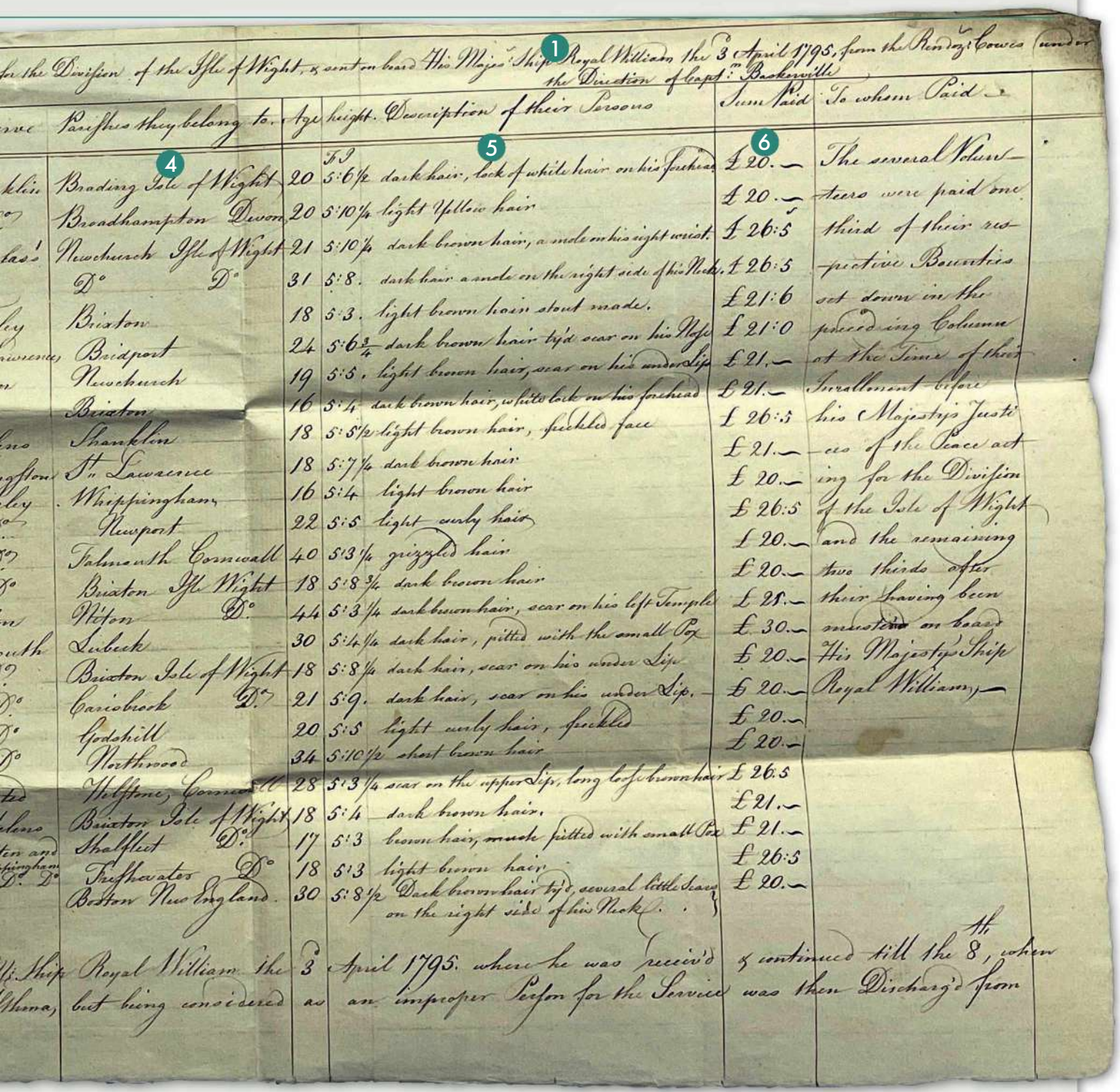
3 Parish
The fourth column records for which parish on the Isle of Wight each of the men served.

4 Home Parish
In contrast, the next column details the parish to which they belonged. Most were local men, but this is not always the case. Henry Schuldt (line 16) was from Lübeck in Germany, and Samuel Hines (line 25) from Boston, New England.

5 Description
Three columns cover the physical description of each man, including any scars and even moles. Many returns record previous occupation, but not here.

6 Sum Paid
The volunteers each received a bounty of £20–30, a third paid on enlistment and two thirds once mustered on board.

This list of volunteers from the Isle of Wight, Hampshire, is held by The National Archives (**nationalarchives.gov.uk**), reference ADM 7/3063/8



for the Division of the Isle of Wight, & sent on board His Majes.ty Ship Royal William the 3 April 1795, from the Rendez.vous Cowes under the Direction of Capt.n Beckwith

	Parishes they belong to.	Age	height.	Description of their Persons	Sum Paid	To whom Paid
	Brading Isle of Wight	20	5:6½	dark hair, lock of white hair on his forehead	£20.—	The several Volun-
	Broadhampton Devon	20	5:10¼	light Yellow hair	£20.—	teers were paid one
	Newchurch Isle of Wight	21	5:10¼	dark brown hair, a mole on his right wrist.	£26:5	third of their res-
	D.o D.o	31	5:8.	dark hair a mole on the right side of his Neck.	£26:5	pective Bounties
	Brixton	18	5:3.	light brown hair stout made.	£21:6	set down in the
	Bridport	24	5:6¾	dark brown hair tied scar on his Nose	£21:0	preceeding Columns
	Newchurch	19	5:5.	light brown hair, scar on his under Lip	£21.—	at the Time of their
	Brixton	16	5:4	dark brown hair, white lock on his forehead	£21.—	Enrollment before
	Shanklin	18	5:5½	light brown hair, freckled face	£26:5	his Majesty's Justi-
	St. Lawrence	18	5:7¼	dark brown hair	£21.—	ces of the Peace act
	Whippingham	16	5:4	light brown hair	£20.—	ing for the Division
	Newport	22	5:5	light curly hair	£26:5	of the Isle of Wight
	Falmouth Cornwall	40	5:3¼	grizzled hair	£20.—	and the remaining
	Brixton Isle Wight	18	5:8¾	dark brown hair	£20.—	two thirds after
	Niton D.o	44	5:3¼	dark brown hair, scar on his left Temple	£21.—	their having been
	Lubeck	30	5:4½	dark hair, pitted with the small Pox	£30.—	mustered on board
	Brixton Isle of Wight	18	5:8¼	dark hair, scar on his under Lip	£20.—	His Majesty's Ship
	Carisbrook D.o	21	5:9.	dark hair, scar on his under Lip.	£20.—	Royal William,
	Godshill	20	5:5	light curly hair, freckled	£20.—	
	Northwood	34	5:10½	short brown hair	£20.—	
	Helstone, Cornwall	28	5:3¼	scar on the upper Lip, long lofe brown hair	£26:5	
	Brixton Isle of Wight	18	5:4	dark brown hair.	£21.—	
	Shalfleet D.o	17	5:3	brown hair, much pitted with small Pox	£21.—	
	Freshwater D.o	18	5:3	light brown hair	£26:5	
	Boston New England.	30	5:8½	Dark brown hair tied, several little Scars on the right side of his Neck.	£20.—	

His Ship Royal William the 3 April 1795. where he was receiv'd & continued till the 8th, when but being considered as an improper Person for the Service was then Discharg'd from

HMS *Victory* launched in 1765, so some of the sailors who served on the ship may have been recruited under the quota system

The first Act of 5 March 1795, entitled 'An act for raising a certain Number of Men, in the several Counties in England, for the service of his Majesty's navy', in fact covered Wales too and required all counties to supply a specified number of men based on each one's population, amounting to a total of 9,870. A further Act of 28 April 1795 extended the requirement to Scotland. An earlier Act, dated 16 March 1795, aimed to provide another 20,354 men from ports across Britain. Parliament stipulated the number of recruits per port, ranging from three in the Isles of Scilly to 5,704 for the Port of London.

The ultimate responsibility lay with the churchwardens and overseers of each parish who were tasked with procuring able-bodied men, with the quarter sessions determining each parish's quota. The Admiralty appointed regulating officers who could reject selections, although local magistrates had the authority to overturn rejections upon appeal.

Counties encountered difficulties meeting quotas and often offered substantial cash bounties to attract mostly inexperienced landsmen, causing discontent among regular seamen who had received considerably less or nothing if pressed into service. Some counties also sent convicted criminals in lieu of punishment, leading to dissatisfaction aboard ships and, at times, the spread of diseases like typhus.

Sending A Substitute

Chosen men could provide a 'personal substitute' willing to serve in their stead. This could be a volunteer or someone from elsewhere in the county, or a neighbouring county. Parishes could also arrange to provide parochial substitutes in lieu of their quota of men.

Landsmen who had never considered a naval career were suddenly tempted by huge bounties, in some cases up to £70. Many found the money difficult to turn down, however unsuitable they may have thought themselves for a life at sea.

The quota system, along with impressment, was discontinued in 1815 following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, because a reduced fleet and an increased supply of unemployed seamen made such measures unnecessary.

Records related to the application of the Acts are generally held by county record offices, because the quarter sessions initially managed their enforcement. A small number are deposited at The National Archives at Kew (TNA; **nationalarchives.gov.uk**). Most of the ports records are regrettably lost, or their whereabouts unknown, but the return for the Port of London is held at TNA (ADM 7/361).

Occasionally the quarter sessions delegated the responsibility to the petty sessions where, nationally, surviving records are limited. Parish-level records, where extant, can be found among documents maintained by churchwardens, overseers of the poor, or the parish vestry. Where the records do survive, these may include recruits' details such as their names, parishes of service or origin, occupations, ages, bounty payments, and descriptions.

The conscription of men into the Navy who had no previous connection with the sea, including from inland areas, may account for missing relations during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, their deaths and burials being unrecorded.

TOP TIP!

If the recruitment documents identify the ship to be served on then its musters, which are held at The National Archives, may reveal more about your ancestor's subsequent service.

Resources

Take your research further

BOOKS

A Social History of the Navy, 1793–1815
Michael Lewis
Chatham Publishing, 2004
First published in 1960, this book includes engaging contemporary quotes.

Nelson's Navy: The Ships, Men and Organisation, 1793–1815
Brian Lavery
Osprey, 2020
Lavery's book provides in-depth coverage, and was first published in 1989.

WEBSITE

DISCOVERY
w **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/**
You can use The National Archives' catalogue to find documents relating to the Quota Acts held here and at more than 3,500 archives across the country.

PAUL BLAKE is a genealogist, lecturer and the author of such books as *Tracing Your Insolvent Ancestors* (Pen & Sword, 2019)

GETTY IMAGES

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Ambassador Cruise Line's no-fly cruising from the UK combines great value with a relaxed, adult-focused experience, making it an easy Cruise Collective recommendation. Sailing from seven regional UK ports, you can forget the fuss of the airport and enjoy your holiday sooner, discovering breathtaking destinations, fantastic food, and immersive entertainment.

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Q&A

Our team of experts offers tips and inspiration Edited By Claire Vaughan

Katherine Cobb is a member of AGRA based in Somerset

Roger Kershaw is migration records specialist at The National Archives

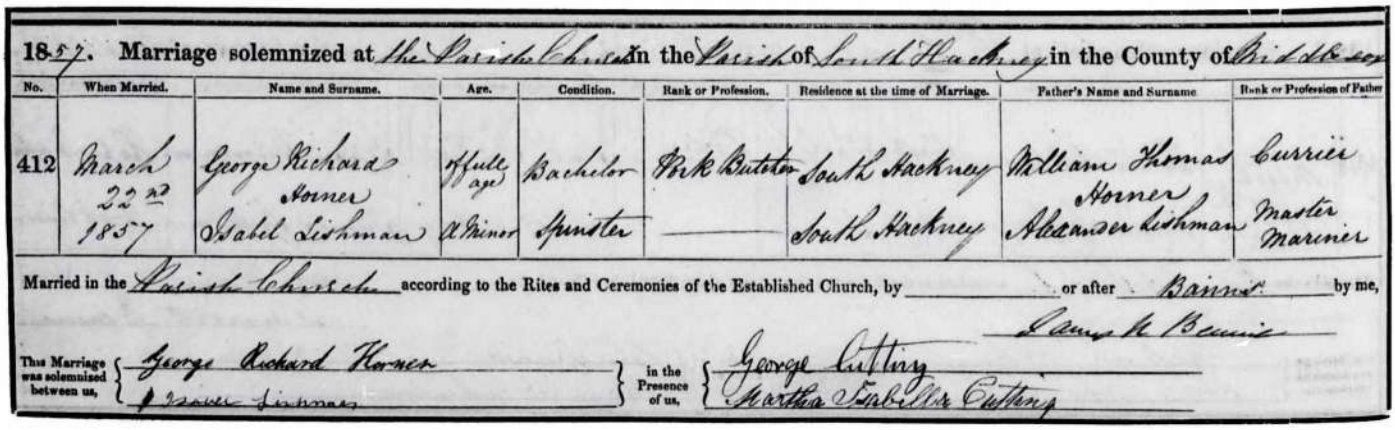
Chris Paton is a genealogist, tutor and blogger from East Ayrshire

Steve Thomas is a genealogist with over 20 years' experience

Phil Tomaselli is a military family history expert and author

Alison Toplis is a dress and textile historian

Helen Whittle is a member of AGRA based in West Sussex



1857. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of South Hackney in the County of Middlesex

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname	Rank or Profession of Father
412	March 22nd 1857	George Richard Horner	of full age	Bachelor	Pork Butcher	South Hackney	William Thomas Horner	Currier
		Isabel Lishman	A Minor	Spinster	—	South Hackney	Alexander Lishman	Master Mariner

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by _____ or after Banns by me, James R Bennis

This Marriage was solemnized between us, George Richard Horner, Isabel Lishman

in the Presence of us, George Cutting, Martha Isabella Cutting

Isabel Lishman married George Richard Horner in 1857, and the record identifies her father Alexander Lishman and mentions his occupation of master mariner

Who is Isabel Lishman's mother?

Q Can you help me identify the mother of my great great grandmother, Isabel Lishman (born 1836)? The most likely candidate seems to be Maria Bonong born 1806 in Tonbridge, Kent.

The first definite record of Isabel is her marriage in 1857 to George Richard Horner, a pork butcher in Hackney. She is described as a "minor", with her father named as Alexander Lishman, a "master mariner". Isabel is described in the censuses as having been born variously in Aberdeen, Glasgow, Scotland or London. However, I can't find an Isabel Lishman born to an Alexander Lishman. The nearest I have found is an Elisabeth Leishman born in 1838 in Aberlady, Scotland, to Alexander and Maria Leishman (Bonong).

Kate Cooke

A I could not find Isabel among the church records available on Scotland's People (**scotlandspeople.gov.uk**). However, it's important to note that not all church records are on the website. Its Old Parish Registers (OPRs) are from the Church of Scotland (the Kirk), while the Catholic Parish Registers (CPRs) are from the Scottish Catholic Church, and the 'Other Records' category comprises Presbyterian denominations formed after splits from the Kirk (not all of these are online). One major denomination entirely missing is that of the Scottish Episcopal Church which operated in Glasgow and around Aberdeen, with records preserved in the churches' respective local authority archives.

Not all church records are on the website Scotland's People

If Isabel's father was a master mariner in 1857, I would search 'Britain, Merchant Seamen, 1835–1857' on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) and 'UK and Ireland, Masters and Mates Certificates, 1850–1927' on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**). If he's not there, consult The National Archives' research guide at **www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/merchant-seamen-in-service-before-1914/**.

If you have tested your autosomal DNA, can you identify any genetic cousins whose ancestors share the name Leishman or Lishman, which might help to confirm a place of origin for them? Can Isabel's children's names provide possible clues for her mother's name?

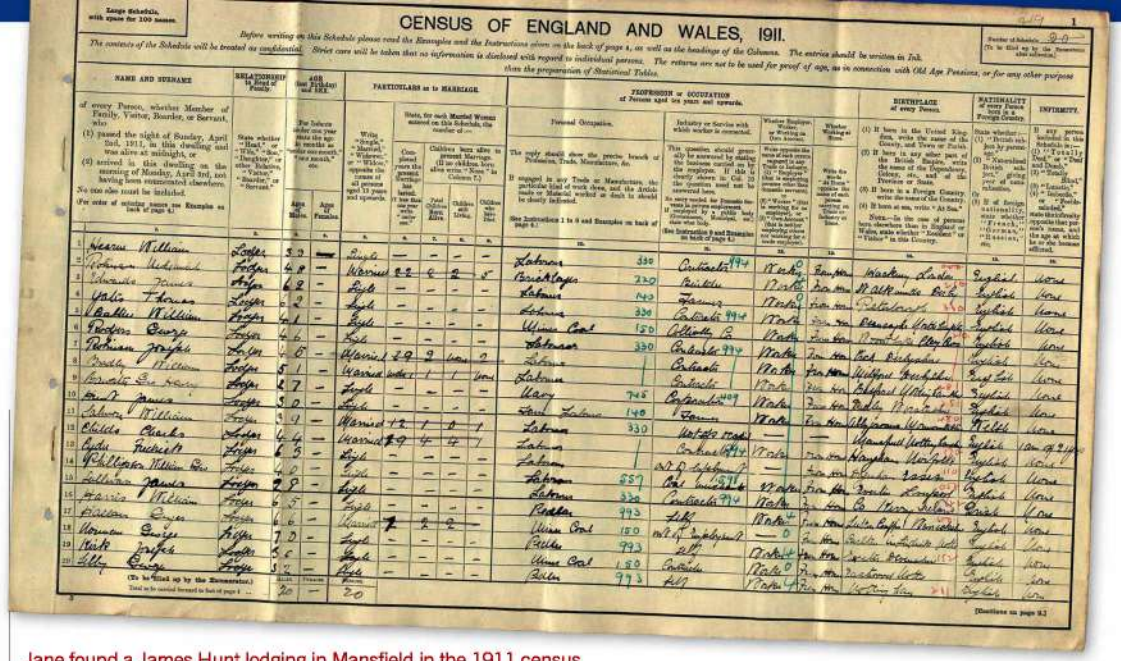
Your theory that Isabel's mother might be Maria Bonong looks unlikely. Maria married Alexander Leishman in 1827 where he is described as a clerk and in the notice of her death, published in *The Caledonian Mercury* in 1865, she is described as the widow of Alexander Leishman, writer.

Chris Paton

HAVE YOU HIT A BRICK WALL? Please email your questions or family photographs to the following address: **wdytyaquestions@ourmedia.co.uk**

If selected, your query will be answered on these pages. Please note that we receive a large volume of correspondence each month, and cannot reply to each message individually. You are more likely to receive a response if you keep the question and background information concise (no more than 150 words), with a clear goal of enquiry.

What happened to Arthur and Ellen Hunt?


CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Jane found a James Hunt lodging in Mansfield in the 1911 census

Q What happened to my great grandfather's brother, Arthur James Hunt, born 14 January 1881, in Abergavenny, Monmouthshire, to James and Lucy Hunt (née Wood, formerly Pritchard), and one of his half-sisters Ellen Pritchard, born 14 April 1874 in Manchester to Lucy and Charles Pritchard? The last sighting of Arthur and Ellen together is on the 1891 census, at Bridge End Inn with their mother and other siblings. Their father, James, died in 1886 and mother, Lucy, in 1893. I found a James Hunt living in Mansfield in the 1911 census, born in Abergavenny in 1881. Could this be Arthur?
Jane Godden

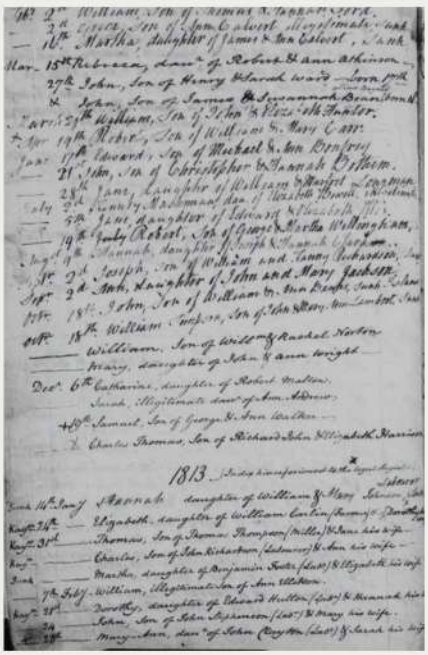
A It was quite common for someone to use their middle name, so the James Hunt in Mansfield could be your great grandfather's brother. Especially as there was no matching birth registration at Abergavenny, although there was one at Bedwellty. By researching James of Bedwellty, you may be able to establish whether he is the James Hunt in Mansfield.

Another possibility is that Arthur James emigrated. Outward passenger lists are indexed on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**), and an Arthur J Hunt, farmer, single, aged 30, departed Liverpool in 1910, bound for Quebec. Could this be him?

A sometimes overlooked finding aid when looking for a lost ancestor is searching the 1939 Register by date of birth. Using the birthdate in combination with Christian name or surname can provide a manageable list for further investigation. A search for Ellen (any surname) born on 14 April 1874 produced a list of 10 names. However, I was unable to match any of the surnames to an Ellen Pritchard marriage.

Searching for Ellen Pritchard marriages near Abergavenny, I noted one to Henry Sheddick in late 1891. I traced this couple through censuses and the 1939 Register, and ruled her out, as she consistently stated that she was born in Herefordshire and, in 1939, gave her date of birth as February 1872. So what became of your great grandfather's half-sister? Could she be the Miss E Pritchard who sailed from Liverpool to New York in 1893?
Katherine Cobb

How do I find a baptism for John Lister?



Steve found the baptism of John Stephenson, son of John and Mary, on 24 February 1813

Q I'm researching my wife's 4x grandfather, Thomas Lister. I found his name on the 1841 marriage certificate of his son John, listed as deceased, his occupation was "Shepherd". John was born in Keyingham, East Yorkshire.

I found a will for a Thomas Lister who died in 1835 in Keyingham, and also a marriage for a Thomas Lister and Elizabeth Stephenson in 1812 in Cottingham; both were buried in Keyingham Cemetery. However, I can't find a baptism for John Lister with father Thomas locally.
Graham Linton

A John Lister is adamant in every census that he was born in Keyingham in 1812/1813; however, no baptism for him can be found there.

Several Johns were baptised in the parish in those years and one of them, baptised on 24 February 1813, was named John Stephenson son of John and Mary. This is their sole child in Keyingham.

Just as Thomas Lister and Elizabeth Stephenson married in Cottingham in 1812, so a John Stephenson and Mary Routledge married there in 1803. It's possible that John was the nephew of Thomas and Elizabeth, remaining in Keyingham and brought up as their son. The burials for Thomas and especially Elizabeth, buried in 1831 aged 58 years, show that they must have married at quite an advanced age and were probably childless.

The way forward is probably a DNA test. Your wife's father, brother or uncle could have their results compared to those of a descendant of the Cottingham John Stephenson. He had several sons baptised there, but no John. There are other John and Mary Stephensons in the vicinity, but some can be excluded by means of a parish register search, which will show them baptising children at the same time.
Steve Thomas

Picture Analysis

Is this Isabella Taylor and her sisters?

Q I believe this photo, taken in Aberdeen, shows my great great grandmother, Isabella Taylor (born 1878), and her three sisters (born 1865, 1868 and 1875). Can you tell me when it was taken and the probable ages of the girls?
Fraser Steedman

A This *carte de visite*, of what appears to be a family group, shows off excellently the clothing worn by girls at different ages. It was taken by Aberdeen photography studio Leith & Co., which first appears in the Scottish Post Office directories in 1881 and is at the address on the reverse of the card throughout the 1880s. The coloured maroon ink used to print the details, along with the slanting name and increasing elaboration, also suggests a date in the 1880s.

This was a period when texture was important, as seen in the shaggy rug draped to one side – a classic prop of studios during this decade – as well as in the velvet of the girls' outfits.

All of the dresses draw on adult fashion to some degree for inspiration, and follow the cuirass (a piece of armour that covers the torso) line popular in the early 1880s. This meant close-fitting bodices with high necklines and tight sleeves, along with narrow skirts embellished with rows of ruching and pleating.

Although childrenswear can be difficult to date precisely because it plays with elements of adult dress, I would suggest a date of around 1882–1883.

This means that the girls would be aged four to five, seven to eight, and around 15–18 years old, the eldest seated.
Alison Toplis

1 HEMLINES
Knee-length or slightly longer dresses were more practical for younger girls than the adult-influenced fashionable sheath-like skirts of the older ones.

2 CORSET
From the shape of her bodice, it appears that the seated girl is wearing an adult corset, which would be expected considering her age.

3 NECKLINES
At around four to five years old, girls moved from wearing short sleeves and a lower neckline to a higher neckline and long sleeves, here with white drawers or pantalettes for modesty. The ruching around the necklines also suggests that the photograph was taken in the early 1880s.

4 HAIR
The way that youngsters wore their hair also imitated adult fashions, although for the younger girls, long loose hair secured behind the head was popular.

How can I find out more about my Voysey ancestors?

Q My great great grandmother, Mary Ford, married Joseph Wathen Voysey (a seaman) on 22 October 1861 at Clifton, Bristol. Mary and her daughters Ellen, eight, and Alice, five, are in the Bristol City Workhouse on the 1871 census. Ellen was born in Hallatrow, Bristol, and Alice in Plymouth. I can't find birth, baptism or later census records for either of them.

I found an Alice Voysey who married Henry J Derby on 7 October 1884 in Boston, Massachusetts, whose parents were Joseph W and Mary Voysey.

Can you fill in any gaps?
Janet Jacob

A When conventional methods and resources fail, it's time for more unusual approaches.

I wondered if Joseph's Royal Navy record might hold some clues, but this gives little information. He enlisted as boy 2nd class on 28 August 1855 for 10 years "after attaining age 18", which would have taken him through until December 1867. His first posting was to HMS *Waterloo*, but there are no details and scant information for this vessel in The National Archives' (TNA's) catalogue (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**).

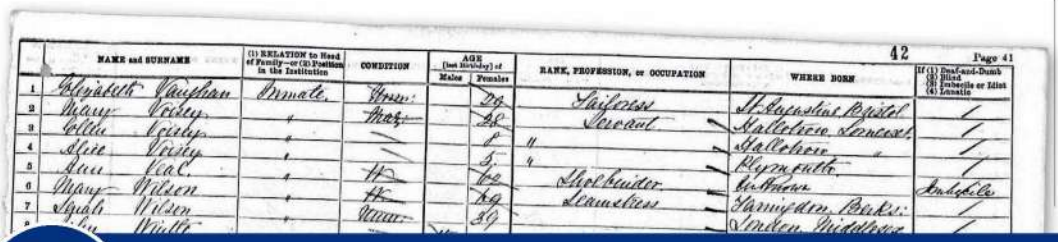
The search is complicated by there being another Joseph Voysey born Bristol c1840 (a coach builder) and a J W(illiam) Voysey of similar age in London.

Perhaps Joseph deserted from the Navy, abandoned his family and lived under a different name? Or possibly emigrated?

If the children's birthplaces in 1871 are correct, there's likely to be some record. Try looking in neighbouring parishes or nonconformist datasets, or using wildcards. I did a search for Alice on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) and found no emigration record, but a check using wildcards may turn up something. I also looked for death records for Joseph and Mary and found the death for a Joseph Voysey in 1913, which should be investigated.

Bristol's workhouse records were destroyed in the Second World War, but the Poor Law union correspondence records (MH 12) at TNA are worth looking at for 1864–1884.
Helen Whittle

Mary Voysey and her daughters Ellen and Alice were recorded in the Bristol City Workhouse in the 1871 census



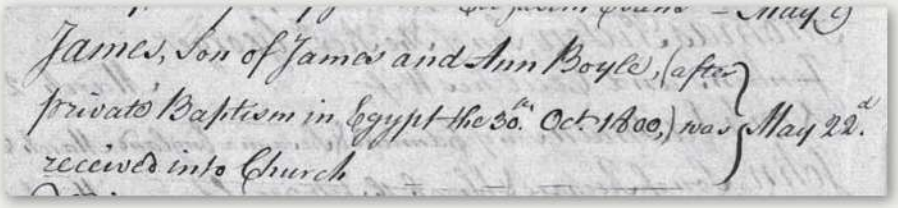
TOP TIP Correspondence from 24 Poor Law unions, covering 1834–1871, has been digitised and catalogued in detail. You can find the list of those included at **www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/poverty-poor-laws/**.

Was James Boyles born in Egypt?

Q My 5x great grandfather, James Boyles, served in the Royal Navy. He married Ann Gantage in Portsmouth on 27 May 1799, while living on HMS *Diadem*.

A transcription states that their first child, James, was baptised on 30 October 1800, Northam, Devon. But the image on FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**) actually says that James was baptised privately in Egypt.

Diadem did go to Egypt for the Napoleonic Wars, so I believe this does refer to Egypt the country. Could a child of an able seaman really have been baptised in Egypt in 1800, and where can I find the original baptism?
Jane Buchan



Jane found this reference to her relative being privately baptised in Egypt in a register on FamilySearch

A Unfortunately, I could find no trace of James, the son, listed in overseas baptisms held by The National Archives at Kew (TNA; **nationalarchives.gov.uk**) in series RG 32, RG 33 or the index in RG 43. I also considered looking at the Egypt consular series in FO 141, but there was no consul-general in Egypt between 1796 and 1803, when James was born.

There are no surviving passenger lists to identify Ann's passage to Egypt, and although not impossible, it would be unusual for a seaman to take his wife overseas when on active service. However, there's likely to have been a Church of England church in Cairo or Alexandria in 1800, so it might be worth contacting the Lambeth Palace Library (**lambethpalacelibrary.info**) since it holds registers of baptisms for overseas territories.

You could consider looking at other Foreign Office series at TNA. To identify Foreign Office correspondence from 1782–1890 relevant to a particular country, person or subject area, you will need to use the Foreign Office indexes and registers in series FO 605. These were used by Foreign Office staff in the 19th century, although not all correspondence to which they refer was sent for preservation to TNA, so some entries now refer to documents that no longer exist.

Note that the correspondence, indexes and registers have not been digitised, so must be viewed in person at TNA.
Roger Kershaw

Big Question

How can I find out what Alfred Beattie did in WW1?

Audrey emailed us this photo of Alfred in his army uniform

Q My husband's grandfather, Alfred Beattie, was born in Liverpool in 1894. I've been told that he was in the Liverpool King's Regiment, and was gassed during the war. We have no medals or his regiment number, just this photograph to go on. Apparently, he went AWOL to get married in 1918. Since both his parents had died, he may have put his sister, Margaret Jane Fitzsimmons, as his next of kin when he joined up.

How can I find out about his service in the First World War?
Audrey Jones

AUDREY JONES would love to know more about the role her husband's grandfather played in the First World War

A Well over 60 per cent of soldiers' service records from the First World War were destroyed by a fire at the War Office repository in Arnside Street, London, on 8 September 1940. This causes significant problems, especially if the soldier didn't receive a campaign medal for service overseas.

The National Archives (TNA) has a section on its website dedicated to First World War campaign medals at **www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-army-medal-index-cards-1914-1920/** with its own search facility. I looked simply for Alfred Beattie – there were only 14 soldiers so named (some with an extra initial) awarded a medal, and only one in the King's Liverpools (KLs). Private Alfred Beattie, number 3333, served in the 9th (Territorial) Battalion, KLs, and, later, the Machine Gun Corps (MGC), number 157655. The medal roll(s) and Medal Index Card for Albert are on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**); search for his name and regimental numbers.

Part-time soldiers, the 9th Battalion were based in Everton Road Barracks, probably where Alfred enlisted in early 1915, because he would have needed six months' training before going to France on 7 August 1915. As Territorial Force (TF) soldiers, they were part of the West Lancashire Division. The shortage of soldiers meant that battalions went out separately, and the 9th Battalion had already gone to 1st Division, fighting with them at the battles of Aubers and Loos in 1915. In January 1916, the old division was reformed in France as the 55th (West Lancashire) Division fighting at the Somme (1916), Third Ypres (Passchendaele, 1917), Cambrai (1917) and the Battle of the Lys (1918), as well as the Hundred Days Offensive/Advance to Victory.

I suspect his 'going AWOL' to marry was treated as a minor offence

It was probably in January 1916 that Alfred transferred to the MGC. Every division now had specialist machine-gun companies, and he most likely joined the 165th MGC, who were brigaded with the 9th KLs as part of 55 Division. Fourteen other KLs transferred with him, according to the medal roll. It seems that the 165th were amalgamated into the 55th Battalion MGC in March 1918.

Albert was released from the Army on 5 March 1919 and awarded the 1914/15 Medal, British War Medal and Victory Medal. I can find nothing about him being gassed, which doesn't mean it's not true, and I suspect his "going AWOL" to marry was treated as a minor offence (although still punishable).

Enos Herbert Glynne Roberts' 1922 history of the 9th Battalion *The Story of the "9th King's" in France* (The Northern Publishing Co. Ltd) is available from the Internet Archive at **tinyurl.com/arch-enos**.

The 9th Battalion War Diaries can be downloaded free from TNA, references WO 95/1269/3 (1 March 1915 to 31 December 1915), WO 95/2927/2 (1 January 1916 to 31 January 1918) and WO 95/2985/2 (1 February 1918 to 31 May 1919). These give a day-by-day account of events.

The War Diaries reference for 165 MGC is WO 95/2927/3 and for 55 MG Battalion is WO 95/2917/2.
Phil Tomaselli

What can you tell me about Oscar?

Q This soldier is thought to be my great grandmother's father, Oscar Wheeler. Can you identify the regiment, and where and when the photo was taken?
Jane Jones

A Since Oscar was born, lived and died in Sussex, I checked the surviving musters for the Royal Sussex Regiment, up to 1888, but there's no sign of him.

It seemed unlikely, given his age, that Oscar served abroad in the First World War. I found no Medal Index Card (MIC) on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) or Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**). A pension card (on Forces War Records; **uk.forceswarrecords.com**) says that he'd served in the Royal Defence Corps (RDC), number 46259. I searched the MIC records at The National Archives at Kew (**nationalarchives.gov.uk**) under 'Oscar' and 'O Wheeler'. An MIC for Lance Corporal O Wheeler appeared, number 7945, Indian Defence Force. He was awarded the British War Medal for serving overseas, by the Government of India. When I searched the MICs using 'Wheeler' and '46259', one emerged for *Frank* Wheeler – he'd re-enlisted using his middle name! This MIC shows that he'd enlisted in the Rifle Brigade, and transferred to the RDC. The medal roll (on Ancestry) says that he enlisted in the 23rd Battalion, Rifle Corps, then transferred to the RDC and served in the Indian equivalent between 9 February 1916 and 10 June 1917. He returned to Britain, and was discharged through illness on 1 January 1918 (Silver War Badge roll, available on Ancestry).

The 23rd Battalion Rifle Corps was for old soldiers, so Oscar must have served previously. Check the Sussex Regiment archives at the West Sussex Record Office (**wsro.org.uk**).
Phil Tomaselli

1 CAP

The cap is an old-style side hat common in the 1890s, but troops in India generally got out-of-date kit and, since the RDC and Indian Defence Force were basically used for guard duties, the deployment of old kit isn't surprising!

2 UNIFORM

Oscar wears a five-button lightweight version of the standard British infantry uniform especially for use in hot climates – usually India or Burma (now Myanmar), but also Mesopotamia and Egypt. The background, which looks natural, suggests India.

3 RANK STRIPES

The single stripe on both sleeves indicates Oscar is a lance corporal as described on his Indian MIC. Because of the need to wash uniforms frequently due to the climate, the stripes were detachable.

4 CUFF CHEVRON

The chevron visible at the cuff is another relic. It had quite vanished from Regular Army soldiers' tunics by 1914, although old kit may well have been issued to new trainees in Britain due to shortages of new uniforms in 1915.

Millers' Tales

Rosemary Collins finds out about the history of mills and millers in Hastings

Bob Wilcock, from Essex, began tracing his family history in order to find out more about the birth family of his father, who was adopted. He became especially interested in his 6x great grandfather Richard Carswell. Records show that Richard was baptised in Hastings, Sussex, in 1655. He became a tailor and in 1692 was appointed by the Commissioners of Customs and Excise as waiter and searcher for the town, checking goods arriving by sea for contraband, and responsible for preventing the illegal export of wool. In 1718 he took over all three Hastings windmills.

"He became a miller in his sixties, which I thought was quite an astonishing achievement," Bob says.

Richard died in 1723, with his son Benjamin taking over the lease for the West Hill mill. Records also suggest that Richard's other sons Thomas and John and his grandson John were also millers. Another grandson, Joseph, was both a miller and baker. After Joseph died, his own sons Joseph and Rowe inherited his businesses. It was only after Rowe's death in 1837 that the family milling businesses, left in the hands of his sons William and James, collapsed or were sold off.

Bob was inspired to carry out a complete study of milling in Hastings and its surrounding parishes. He found that some research had been carried out by a mills and local historian, but there was no complete history available.

At the beginning of 2025 he published his 10 years of research in the book *The Mills and Millers of Hastings and Environs*, supported by a grant from Sussex Record Society (**sussexrecordsociety.org**). Bob has found records of millers dating as far back as 1279, but the bulk of the book's 404 pages cover the four centuries from 1540 to the last mill closing operations in 1941.

"By analysing original documents, Sherlock Holmes style as it were, I could achieve results that nobody had managed in the past 90-odd years, and the book emerged out of it," Bob says.

The records he used to trace millers included Hastings Corporation tax records, Poor Law overseers' assessments, and wills accessed online and at the particularly helpful East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Record Office (**thekeep.info**).

This photograph of Carswell's Smock Mill and Carswell's Great Mill on Hastings' West Hill was taken c1860

My forebear became a miller in his sixties, an astonishing achievement

"Millers' wills were an absolute gold mine. I found one incident where the widow objected to not being left a house and windmill. Going to The National Archives at Kew (**nationalarchives.gov.uk**) and reading the papers from the Chancery Court gave me a history of the mill for the previous 50 years."

Bob also traced the stories of the millers, and the book reveals interesting and sometimes poignant human details from their lives.

An 1804 record, for example, notes that while three-year-old Marianne Webb "was at play near the mill at which her father was grinding, the swifts [sails] struck her, and occasioned her death almost immediately".

In another case, an inquest into the 1869 death of Andrew Amoore, trading from mills in Ore and Guestling, says that he drowned in the sea, where he used to paddle to ease the pain from varicose veins: "His body was found in the sea, fully clothed, with his boots on, and his hat floating nearby."

Bob says that he follows the approach of "proactive family history", as described by the genealogist Nick Barratt: "You take those names and find out who the people were, and not just who they were related to, but how they lived their lives."

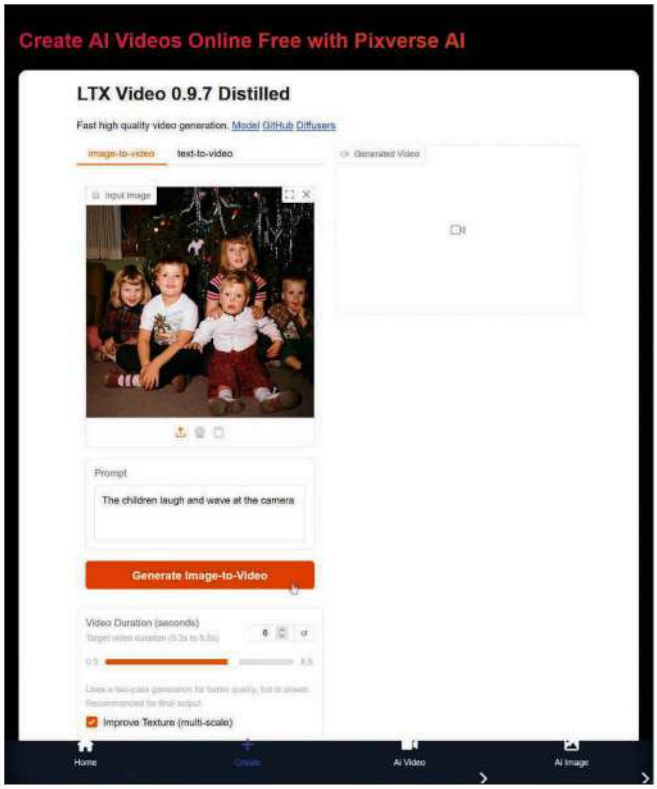
Find Out More

For more information, or to purchase *The Mills and Millers of Hastings and Environs* for £39.95 with free P&P in the UK, email *lots.runnier.59@icloud.com*.

TELL YOUR STORY

Share your local history project with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *rosemary.collins@ourmedia.co.uk*



Turn an old photo into an animated Christmas card

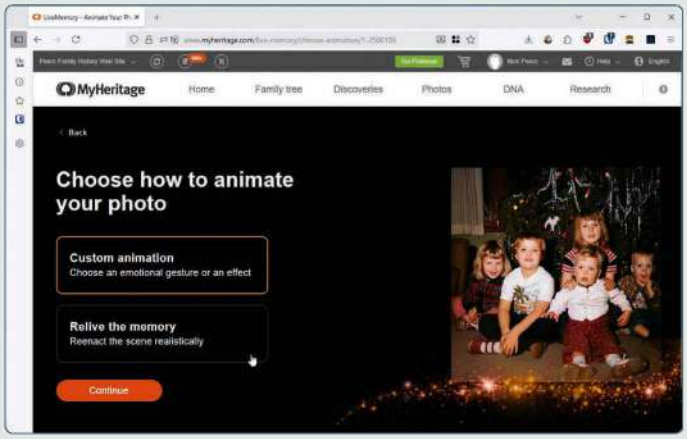
Nick Peers explains how to bring an old family photo to life as an animated greetings card

Looking for a fun way to wish your relations a Merry Christmas? Why not enlist the help of your ancestors by grabbing an old family photo and sprinkling a little AI magic to animate it as part of a digital greetings card? In this month's 'Tech Tips', we'll reveal how to both create your animated clip and incorporate it into a slick virtual card with text and sound that you can share with relatives near and far.

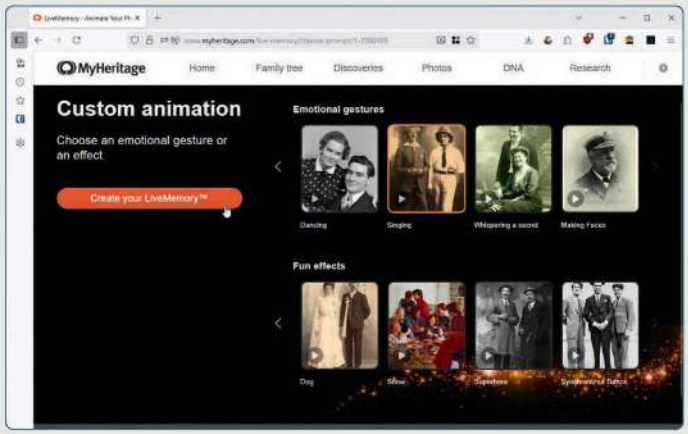
When it comes to creating your clip, the obvious choice is to use MyHeritage's LiveMemory tool, which does all the hard work for you: **myheritage.com/live-memory**. A word of warning, though: you can only create three or four animated LiveMemories for free before you'll need to upgrade to a paid subscription such as the Photo Plan, which currently costs £59 including VAT for your first year, then £99 every year thereafter. For this reason, we'll also show you how to use a completely free alternative Pixverse AI (**pixverseai.org/en/create**) that allows you to generate two or three images each day, with no sign-up or free account required.

We'll also show you how to use a free website to transform your new animation into a virtual greetings card with text, a recorded message and even background music.

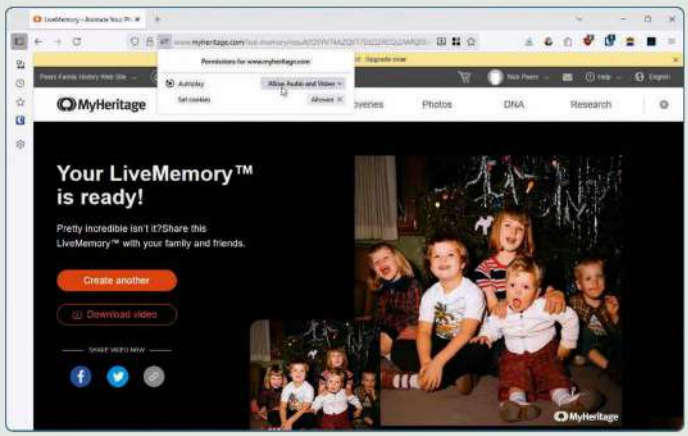
TOP TIP!
Keep your Pixverse AI text prompts simple and closely related to what people are doing in the original photograph to ensure that you get the best results.



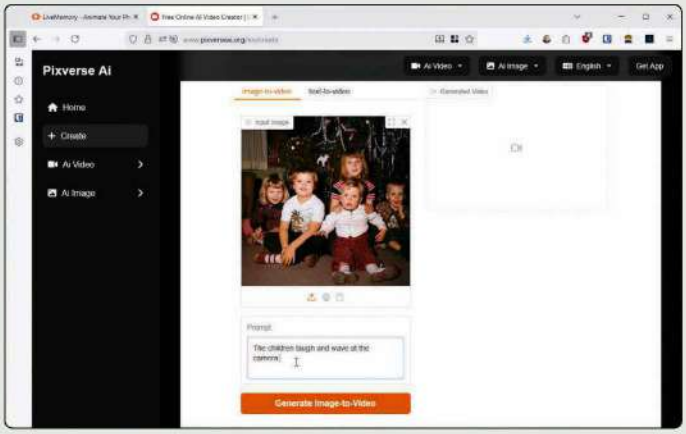
1 Create A Clip With MyHeritage Log into your MyHeritage account, then navigate to **myheritage.com/live-memory**. Click 'Upload photo' to select your image from your hard drive. Once uploaded, choose either 'Custom animation' (for more options) or 'Relive the memory' (fully automated) before clicking 'Continue'.



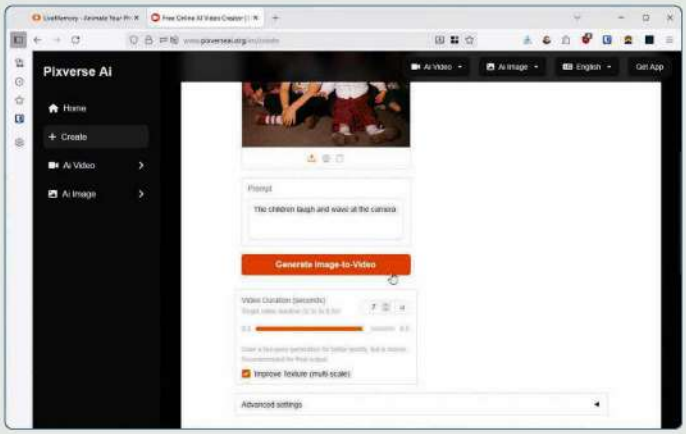
2 Customise And Generate Your Clip If choosing the custom option, you'll be given a selection of gestures – seven emotional and 14 whimsical – to choose from. Roll your cursor over each one for a preview. Once selected, click 'Create your LiveMemory'. You'll need to wait to be notified by email that your LiveMemory is ready.



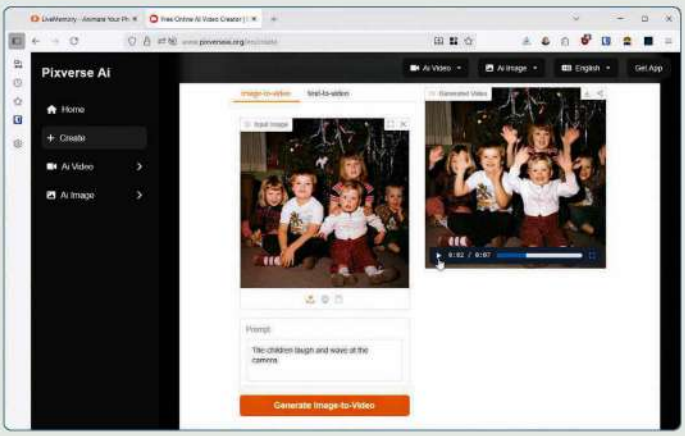
3 Download Your Clip Click the link in the email to view your clip online; if it doesn't play automatically then check that your browser hasn't prevented videos automatically playing on **myheritage.com**. Click 'Download video' to save the video to your hard drive, or 'Create another' to try a different photo and/or effect.



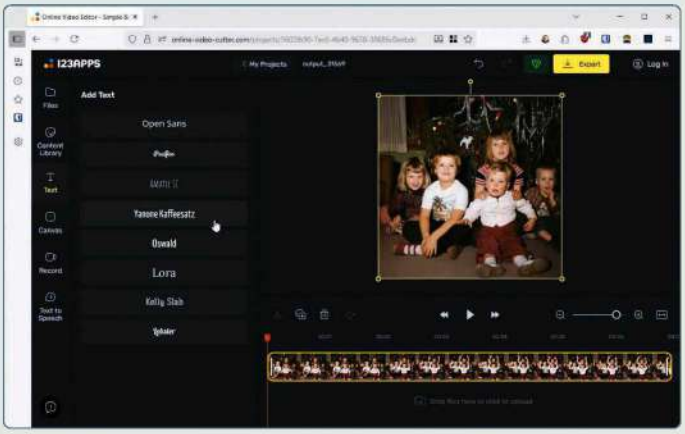
4 Create Your Clip With Pixverse AI Instead If you don't want to use MyHeritage, visit Pixverse AI: **pixverseai.org/en/create**. Upload your image into the 'Input Image' box, then use the 'Prompt' box to describe what you want the people in your photo to do when animated. Once you've entered your text, scroll down.



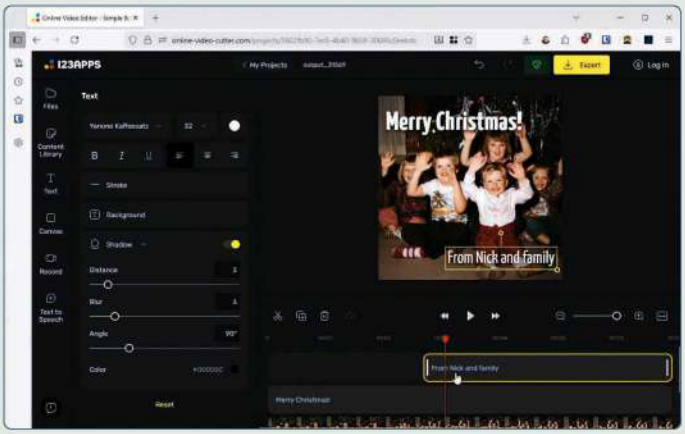
5 Choose The Length And Generate Your Clip Use the slider to decide how long the clip should last (between 0.3 and 8.5 seconds – the default setting of 2 seconds is a little short). Leave 'Improve Texture (multi-scale)' ticked, ignore the 'Advanced settings' section and click the 'Generate Image-to-Video' button.



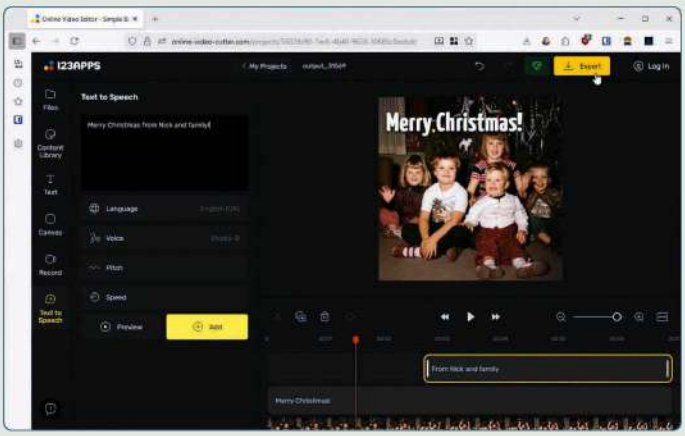
6 View, Revise And Download After about 30 seconds the video will be generated, and you can play it back. You may need to try a different prompt if your instruction was too hard for the AI engine to process; otherwise, click the grey download icon in the top-right corner of the preview window to save the video to your hard disk.



7 Create Your Greetings Card When your clip is ready, go to **online-video-cutter.com/video-editor** and click 'Create Project'. Click 'Add files' to upload your animated photo. You'll see the full range of editing tools on the left – click the T button to access the Text tool as shown. Start by clicking the font you wish to use.



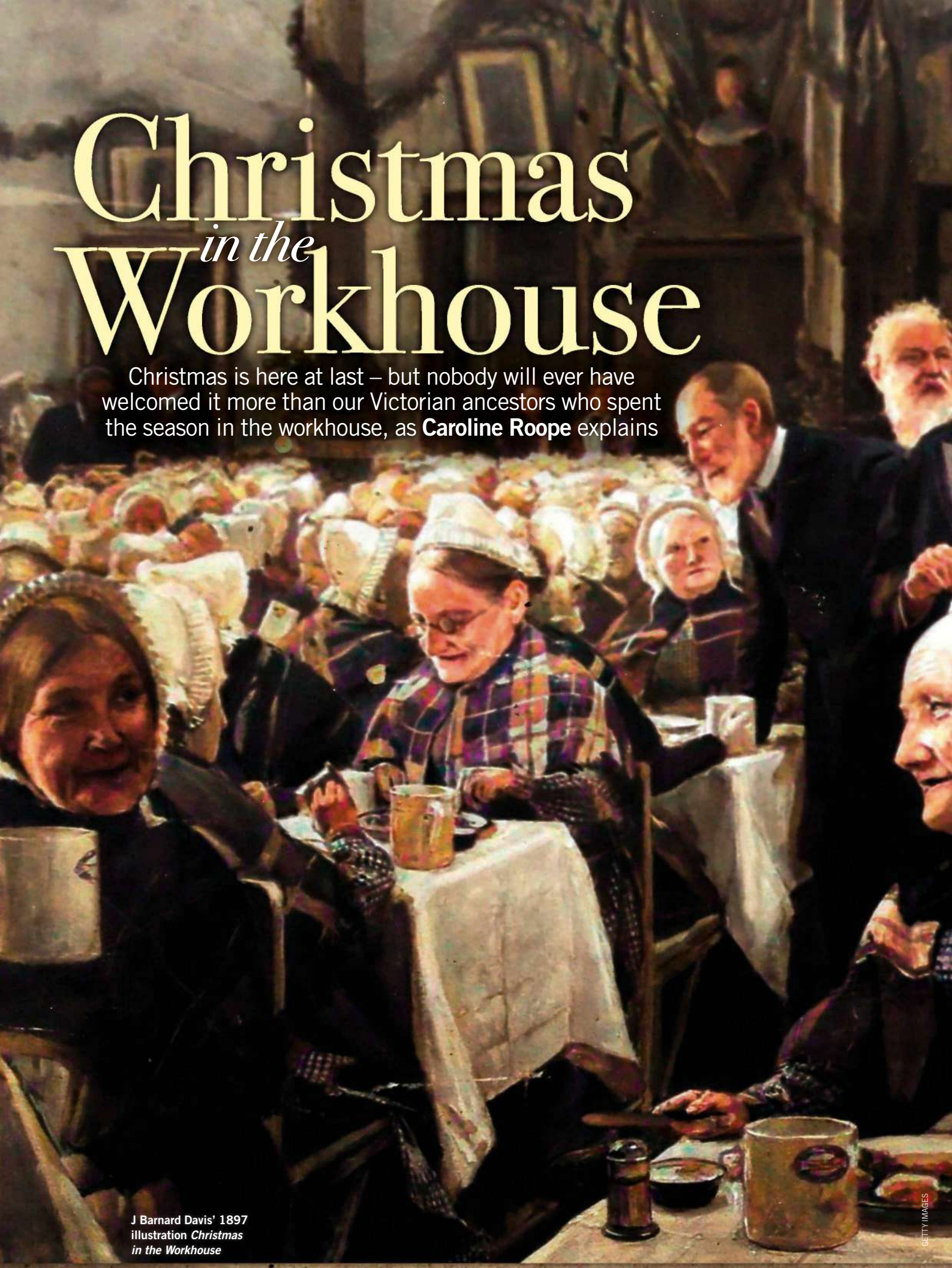
8 Add Your Text A text box will appear on top of your video – type all or part of your greeting into it. Move and resize the text using the bounding box, or use the controls on the left for additional formatting options. Add extra text boxes as required. Use the timeline controls below the video to determine when each text box appears.



9 Add Audio And Export You can add an audio greeting using the Text to Speech tool at the bottom, or use the Content Library to add some free background music. Once you've finished your virtual card to your satisfaction, click 'Export' at the top right to save it as an MP4 file, which you can then email to your relatives.

Christmas *in the* Workhouse

Christmas is here at last – but nobody will ever have welcomed it more than our Victorian ancestors who spent the season in the workhouse, as **Caroline Roope** explains



J Barnard Davis' 1897 illustration *Christmas in the Workhouse*

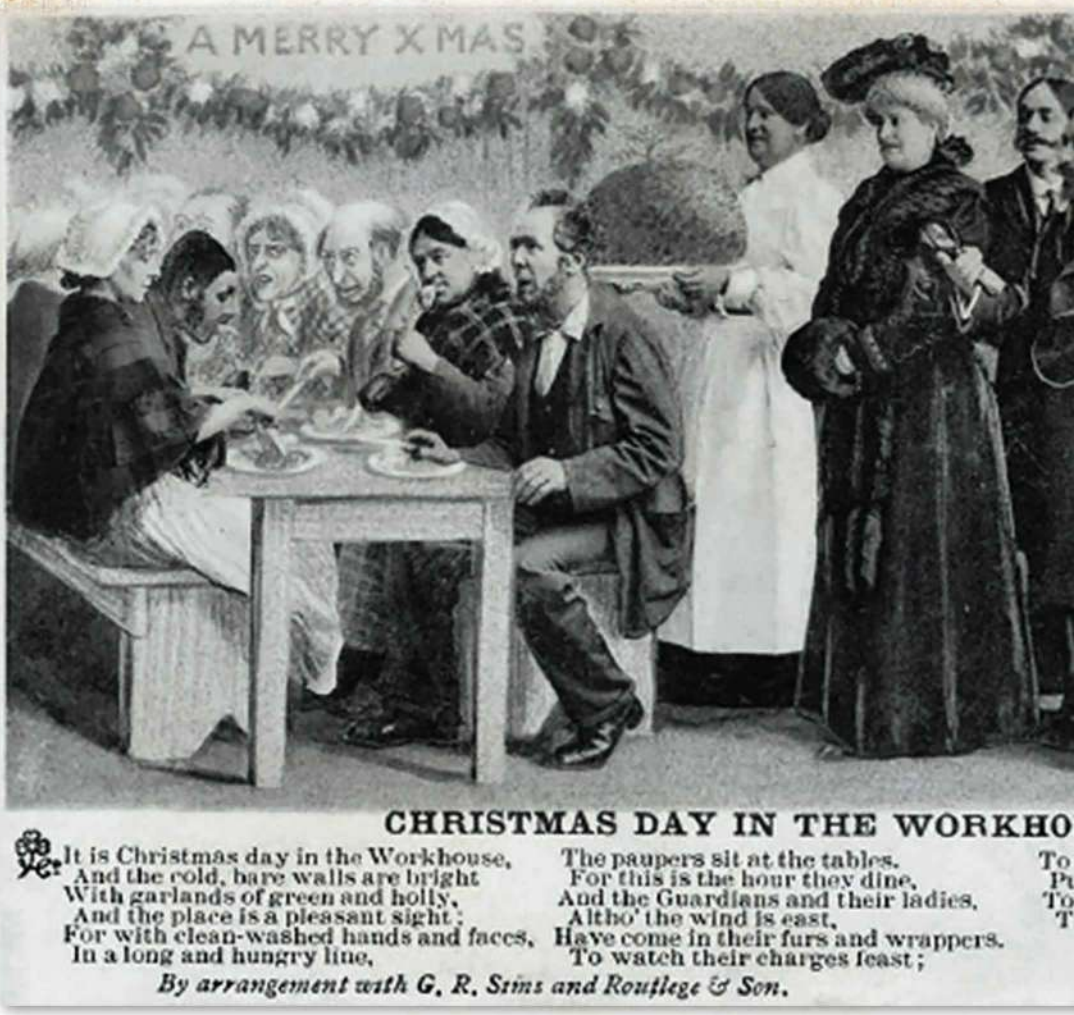
GETTY IMAGES

There is something pleasant in the thought that joviality will reign to-morrow in such grim homes as London workhouses," a reporter for the *West Londoner* wrote on Christmas Eve 1870. "There will be an allowance of gravied beef and of very attractive and certainly wholesome plum-pudding put upon the boards for each poor pauper." For the majority of our 19th-century ancestors, Christmas was a time of joy, feasting and festivity – including the thousands who found themselves within the cold, regimented walls of the workhouse. In fact, Christmas Day was the one date that a hearty meal and a few hours of respite from the gruelling regime was guaranteed – a highly anticipated day of seasonal cheer in what was usually a grim, cheerless environment.

Early versions of the workhouse existed as far back as the 1601 Elizabethan Poor Law, and many parishes set up small workhouses in the 18th century. The aim was to reduce the cost of poor relief, discourage dependence on welfare, and enforce a moralistic approach to poverty through punishment and hardship.

These parish workhouses provided quite generously for their inmates during the festive season. Cheese, ale, baked veal, roast mutton, and spiced cake could be found on the Christmas menu at many workhouses, as well as bacon and beer. Those benefiting from 'outdoor relief' – financial support and donations to the poor living away from the workhouse – were often given additional help at Christmas by local benefactors and the gentry.

This seemingly high standard of living eventually led to resentment among the middle and upper classes whose taxes paid for their local poor, as well as the parish workhouse and its inhabitants. With the cost of looking after the destitute growing more expensive every year, a new system was proposed. The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act made workhouses a central part of the national welfare system. Unions were formed by merging individual parishes under one board of guardians who were responsible for overseeing the workhouse and its operation. It was hoped that the 'New Poor Law' would discourage the provision of relief for anyone not entering the workhouse.



George R Sims' *Christmas Day in the Workhouse* (1877) pours scorn on wealthy patrons visiting workhouses

A Family's Last Resort

From the outset, workhouses were seen as a last resort, offering food and shelter in return for hard labour, the loss of personal freedom, and the segregation of family units. The workhouse was harsh and dehumanising, rather than a place of safety. It was something to be feared, and deliberately designed to deter all but the most desperate. A letter written by a pauper named Henry Jones in 1868, and held by The National Archives at Kew (TNA; **nationalarchives.gov.uk**), gives some indication of the conditions that could be expected by a new inmate at Pwllheli Union Workhouse, on the Llŷn Peninsula in North-West Wales. "The first night I was shown my bed there was but very little straw in it I was oblige [sic] to sleep on it for several nights before I got any more straw, it made my bones to ache all over. I have been here only a few days [but] I found that every man was crawling with the vermin here… And as for the food we get it is but scanty… Our breakfast and supper is full of black beetles and earwigs and all kind of filth enough to turn the stomach of a strong man."

Yet even within this bleak environment, Christmas offered a rare moment of relief. In the earliest years of the New Poor Law, when the workhouse regime was at its strictest, there was a marked difference to Christmas under the Old Poor Law. The Poor Law commissioners, who oversaw the system at a national level from 1834 onwards, ordered that no extra food was to be given on any feast day, including Christmas Day. In many unions, this also

Plum pudding was served in many workhouses

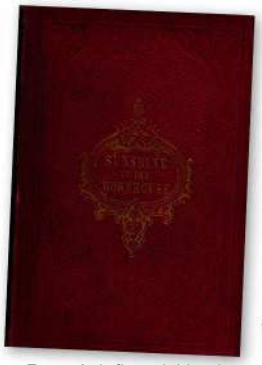
GETTY IMAGES

Emma Sheppard 1813–1871

One writer's campaigning helped improve the lives of workhouse inmates

Emma Brown was born in Bath, Somerset, in 1813. In 1834 she married George Wood Sheppard, a prominent cloth manufacturer, magistrate and chair of the Frome Union Board of Guardians. Through her husband's involvement in the union, Emma became deeply concerned about the harsh conditions in workhouses and began to make regular visits to Frome Workhouse in the early 1850s. She spoke out against the loss of freedom and lack of basic comforts for inmates, and argued for more humane, reform-driven care.

In 1857 Emma wrote a popular anonymous pamphlet entitled *Experiences of a Workhouse Visitor*, freely available via Google Books (**tinyurl.com/google-books-exp-shep**), mentioning how she brought gifts for inmates so that "Christmas tide may be made a hundred fold happier than it was ever before". The following year she expanded her pamphlet into the book *Sunshine in the Workhouse*, published by Nisbet & Co. and credited to Mrs GW Sheppard, which drew more attention to the plight of the poor, in particular unmarried mothers (this is also available on Google Books at **tinyurl.com/google-books-sunshine-work**). In addition, Emma founded her own cottage home for 'fallen women' in Frome, where inmates were free to leave during the day so long as they agreed to abstain from alcohol and return home by 5pm.



Emma's influential book *Sunshine in the Workhouse*

In 1871 Emma was visiting her brother in Wokingham when she had a stroke and died. Hundreds mourned her at her funeral at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Frome.

extended to alcoholic beverages – so those who were expecting a festive tipple were to be sorely disappointed. An article that was published in the *Weekly Chronicle* in 1839, sarcastically headlined "Christmas Cheer for the Workhouse Poor", criticised such an uncharitable decision: "The poor-law commissioners… refused to sanction any extra allowance to the poor in the unions that have been recently formed; a refusal which we consider highly injudicious and exceedingly unkind, to say the least of it."

The anonymous writer also noted that in the workhouses that were still under parish control "the commissioners raised no objection to the continuance of the custom", and those inmates were "regaled with roast or boiled beef (varying in quantity), plum-pudding, bread, vegetables, and, in most instances, a pint of beer each, as they were last year".

There were obvious downsides to the provision of alcohol. "Elizabeth Hanson, a pauper, of Shadwell-workhouse, was brought before Captain Richbold, for a most violent and outrageous assault on three or four of the other inmates," reported the *British Press* on 27 December 1829. The "Christmas Workhouse Broil" was caused by inmates "enjoying the fruits of a charitable donation until they had got somewhat inebriated and fell out with each other".

At Oxford Workhouse in 1885 the dining hall was elaborately decorated

By the middle of the 19th century most workhouses were marking the day with modest festivities such as extra food, simple decorations such as holly and ivy, or a religious service. The *North London Record* reported in 1861 that the inmates of Clerkenwell Workhouse in Central London were regaled on Christmas Day with "good old English fare, roast beef and plum pudding of first-rate quality". At Oxford Workhouse in 1885 the dining hall was elaborately decorated ready for the inmate's dinner of beef, legs of mutton, potatoes and parsnips, followed by plum pudding.

Snuff For The Women

Apples and oranges were also distributed, along with pipes and tobacco for the men and snuff for the women. Inmates at Ripon Workhouse in Yorkshire woke up on Christmas morning 1882 to find a letter on "pretty illuminated card" underneath their pillows, according to the *Pateley Bridge & Nidderdale Herald*. And in 1862 the *Frome Times* reported that Somerset-based reformer Emma Sheppard (see the box) and her family had paid a visit to the union workhouse to distribute "tea and sugar to the women, toys to the children, and cake to all".

The board of guardians (elected for each workhouse) often visited in person during the Christmas period to witness the benefits of their generosity. In an age when philanthropy was a core requirement of social ▶

The dining room of Greenwich Workhouse, South-East London, at Christmas 1864

▶ responsibility among the middle and upper classes, the more cynical commentators regarded this type of 'virtue signalling' as demeaning. The melodramatic monologue *Christmas Day in the Workhouse* (1877) by journalist George R Sims touches on this idea with its "Guardians and their ladies" who have come to "Smile and be condescending, / Put pudding on pauper plates, / To be hosts at the workhouse banquet / They've paid for with the rates".

Christmas Is Cancelled

Not everyone's experience was the same, however. While the vast majority of workhouses celebrated Christmas – if only on the day itself – there were still a handful of unions that refused to provide anything close to tidings of comfort and joy. The inmates of the Caxton and Arrington Union in Cambridgeshire threatened to riot because of the Christmas Day arrangements in 1868. In a letter to the board of guardians, held by TNA, the inmates complained that "the Old men & Women and Children and Sick are to have their fare for their Christmas Dinner as usual but the able-bodied men & women are to be Deprived of it and not have any at all which is causing a great disturbance all throughout the union". Those affected felt it to be a "very unfair thing".

Sometimes celebrations really got out of hand. In the same year, one inmate wrote to the *East London Observer* complaining, "I have been an inmate of Bethnal Green workhouse for years and never before have I witnessed [sic] such disgraceful proceedings as were kept upon Christmas night till a very late hour… The officers and inmates male and female were in our ward drinking and singing and on Boxing-day the male officers were drinking nearly all day and at supper time there was no one to Read prayers or grace they were all in such a disorderly state and worse, that after supper there was a quantity of what are termed the Refractory girls [female inmates whose behaviour was consistently bad] dressed in men's clothing dancing in the Hall with the officers male and female."

Still, the fact that the Christmas spirit survived for many inmates of the workhouse reminds us that the true spirit of the season lies in small gestures of kindness that will have held immense meaning in the bleakest of environments.

CAROLINE ROOPE works in the heritage sector and writes about social history. Her latest book is *The Real DH Lawrence* (Pen & Sword, 2024)

Resources

Take your research further

ARCHIVE

The National Archives

a **Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU**
t 020 8876 3444
w **nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/poverty-poor-laws**

TNA holds records of the Poor Law Commission, the government department that supervised the Poor Law unions. These primarily relate to the general business of the workhouses. Most records concerning the operation of the Poor Law before 1834 are held by local archives. They also have surviving workhouse records.

MUSEUM

Southwell Workhouse and Infirmary

a **Upton Road, Southwell, Nottinghamshire NG25 0PT**
t 01636 817260
e *theworkhouse@nationaltrust.org.uk*
w **nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/nottinghamshire-lincolnshire/the-workhouse-and-infirmary**

Southwell Workhouse was built in 1824, and is one of the best-preserved workhouses in England.

WEBSITES

British Newspaper Archive

w **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**

Poor Law unions and workhouses were a frequent topic in the press.

The Workhouse

w **workhouses.org.uk**

Peter Higginbotham's authoritative site is packed with information.

Voices of the Victorian Poor

w **voices-of-the-victorian-poor-nationalarchives.hub.arcgis.com/pages/research**

Search and filter letters from paupers, the wider poor and their advocates, written between 1834 and 1900, by writer's name, topic, location and Poor Law union.

GETTY IMAGES

MERCHANDISE

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- The Irish Famine
- Berkshire kin

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- Post-WW2 sources
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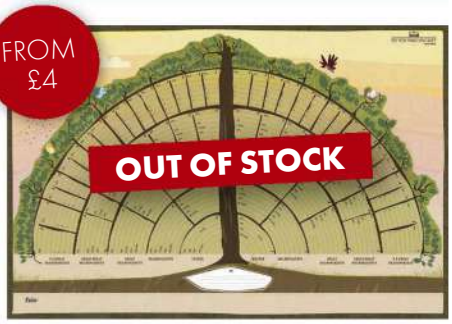

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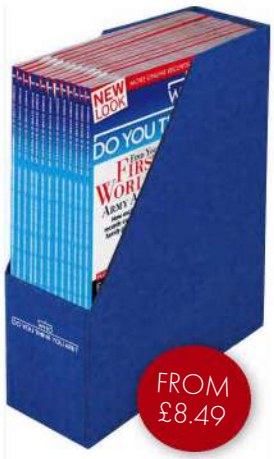

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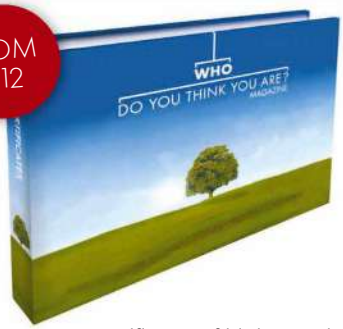

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'DNA And Signatures Proved William's Bigamy'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

Owen Rowe's great grandfather married three times, two of them bigamously – and changed his surname to avoid prosecution. Interview by **Gail Dixon**

Unusually, my story begins at the end with the perplexing death certificate of my great grandfather William Taylor. William died aged 71 in May 1938, in Gosport, Hampshire, and the death was registered by his wife Hannah Hannigan. William was a soldier, and the couple married in 1900 when he was stationed in Plymouth, Devon. The valiant Hannah gave birth to 10 healthy children, including my grandmother Kathleen.

William served in the British Army between 1899 and 1907, then re-enlisted at the outbreak of the First World War.

He left the service four years later, and became a fishmonger and a gardener.

Although there was nothing extraordinary there, the death certificate gave his name as "William Beaver otherwise William Taylor". No one had ever heard of the name Beaver in our family.

My Brick Wall

My dad Ted found the certificate, and speculated that William Taylor had died during the First World War and that a man called William Beaver took his identity so that Hannah and the family would receive his pension. I instead suspected that they were one and the same, although proving it would be a challenge.

I began researching William in 2020, and found clues in census returns and the 1939 Register. They suggested that he was born in 1867 in either Mirfield in West Riding of Yorkshire (now West Yorkshire), or Mossley which is part of Greater Manchester.

Dad already had William's army pension record, and this gave an important breakthrough.

William enlisted in 1899, and joined the Royal Garrison Artillery. The document was begun that year and gave his next of kin as "wife" Mrs Taylor of 50 Woolwich Street, Blackburn, Lancashire.

A few years later the record was amended in heavy ink to provide Hannah's details as his wife. Another addition was made under next of kin, listing William's "Elder sister Eliza Ellen Taylor" of Portsmouth Street, Blackburn.

Eliza Ellen and 50 Woolwich Street proved to be fantastic leads. In 1901, a married woman called Eliza Ellen Taylor lived at that address with her mother Mrs Birtwell and two children Fred (14) and Elizabeth (eight).

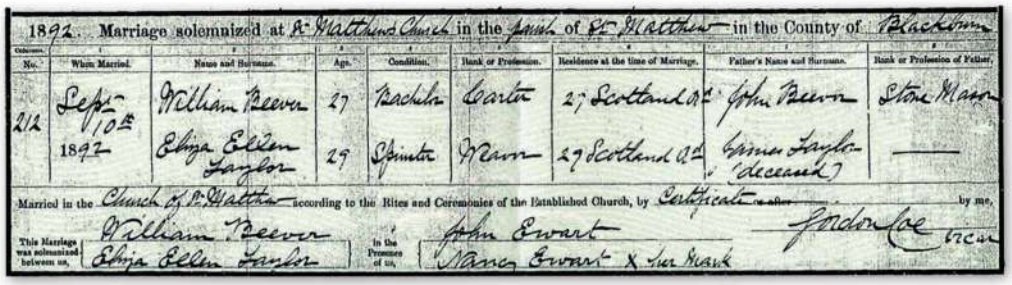
Eliza Ellen Birtwell married John Taylor in Blackburn in 1886, and had their son Fred. However, she wasn't living with John when the 1891 census was taken, and I couldn't find a death record for him or a divorce.

My Eureka Moment

Crucially, I found a marriage for William *Beever*, father's name John Beever, and Eliza Ellen Taylor in Blackburn in 1892. Despite the misspelling, this seemed really promising so I took a leap of faith and surmised that Eliza Ellen had separated from John Taylor and begun a relationship with William Beever.

She fell pregnant and married William bigamously just before their daughter Elizabeth was born in 1893. Her birth record gave the parents' names as William Beaver and Eliza Taylor.

After William left to join the Army, Eliza Ellen reverted to calling herself Taylor and he


1892. Marriage solemnized at St Matthew's Church in the parish of St Matthew in the County of Blackburn

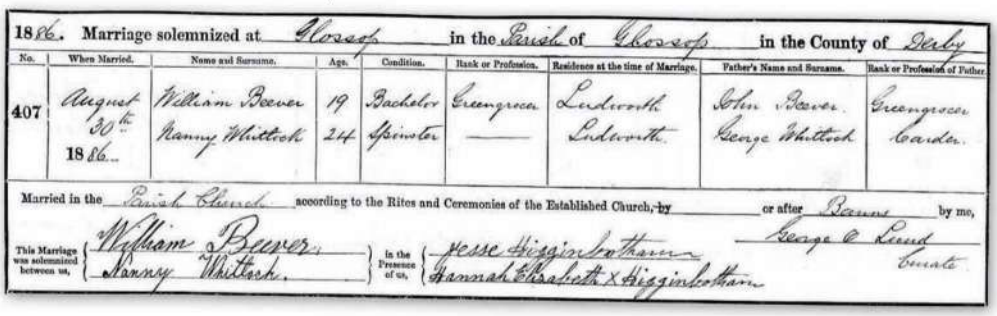
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
212	Sept 10th 1892	William Beever	27	Bachelor	Carter	27 Scotland St	John Beever	Stone Mason
		Eliza Ellen Taylor	29	Spinster	Warper	29 Scotland St	James Taylor (deceased)	—

Married in the Church of St Matthew according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by Certificate ~~or after~~ by me, Gordon Lee Curate

This Marriage was solemnized between us, William Beever, Eliza Ellen Taylor. In the Presence of us, John Ewart, Nancy Ewart X her mark

The record of William's bigamous marriage to Eliza Ellen Taylor on 10 September 1892

OWEN ROWE lives in Fareham, Hampshire, and is a business analyst. He has been researching his family tree for four years


1886. Marriage solemnized at Glossop in the Parish of Glossop in the County of Derby

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
407	August 30th 1886	William Beever	19	Bachelor	Greengrocer	Ludworth	John Beever	Greengrocer
		Nanny Whitlock	24	Spinster	—	Ludworth	George Whitlock	Carder

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, ~~by~~ or after Banns by me, George C Lund Curate

This Marriage was solemnized between us, William Beever, Nanny Whitlock. In the Presence of us, Jesse Higginbotham, Hannah Elizabeth X Higginbotham

William Beever married Nanny Whitlock in 1886 – this was his only legitimate marriage

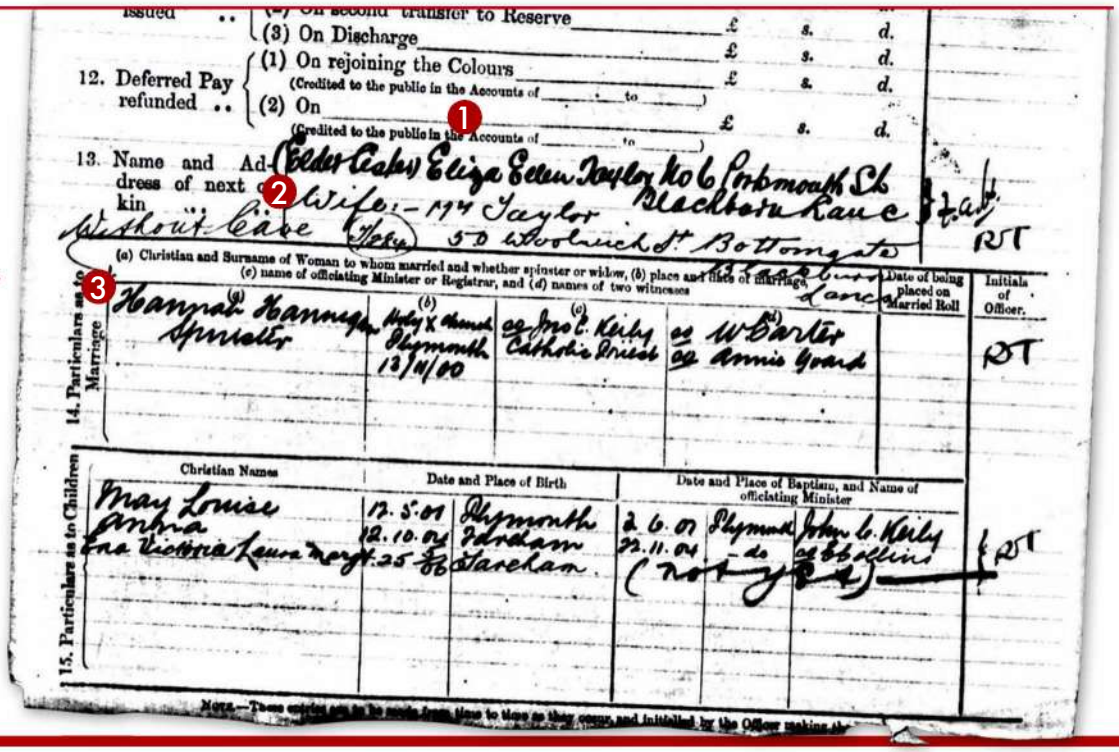
Army Pension Record

Owen pieced together clues about William's wives from this document

1 Eliza
William eventually named Eliza Ellen Taylor, his second wife, as his elder sister so that she would be supported if he died and to avoid prosecution for bigamy.

2 Mrs Taylor
Originally, in 1899, William gave his next of kin as wife Mrs Taylor of 50 Woolwich Street, Blackburn.

3 Hannah
The document was amended to include Hannah Hannigan, his third wife whom he married bigamously in 1900.


12. Deferred Pay refunded .. (1) On rejoining the Colours (Credited to the public in the Accounts of ____ to ____)
(2) On ____ (Credited to the public in the Accounts of ____ to ____)
(3) On Discharge ____
13. Name and Address of next of kin ..
(a) Christian and Surname of Woman to whom married and whether spinster or widow, (b) place and date of marriage, (c) name of officiating Minister or Registrar, and (d) names of two witnesses
14. Particulars as to Marriage
15. Particulars as to Children
Christian Names | Date and Place of Birth | Date and Place of Baptism, and Name of officiating Minister
Date of being placed on Married Roll | Initials of Officer.

changed his name from Beever to Taylor, presumably to hide the bigamous marriage. He named Eliza Ellen (Mrs Taylor) on his pension record so that she would be supported if he died. After his bigamous marriage to Hannah in 1900, Eliza Ellen had to become his "sister" to conceal the crime.

To test my theory, I added William Beever to my tree at Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) to see if DNA connections popped up. Several appeared linking me to grocer John Beaver and his wife Mary, who had a son called William in Mossley in 1867. Finally, I was convinced that William Taylor and William Beever were the same man.

I began blithely deleting irrelevant records until I reached one that made me pause. It was the marriage of William Beever and Nanny Whitlock in Glossop, Derbyshire, in 1886. William was 19 and gave his father's details as John Beever, greengrocer.

Could this be the same man? I began researching Nanny Whitlock who had two children, Sarah Ann Beever in 1887 and Leonard Beever in 1889.

I compared the signature on William's marriage certificate to Nanny with the signatures on both the army pension record and the marriage to Eliza Ellen. They all had the same distinctive flourish on the 'W' and dot placement on the 'i's.

Newfound Cousin

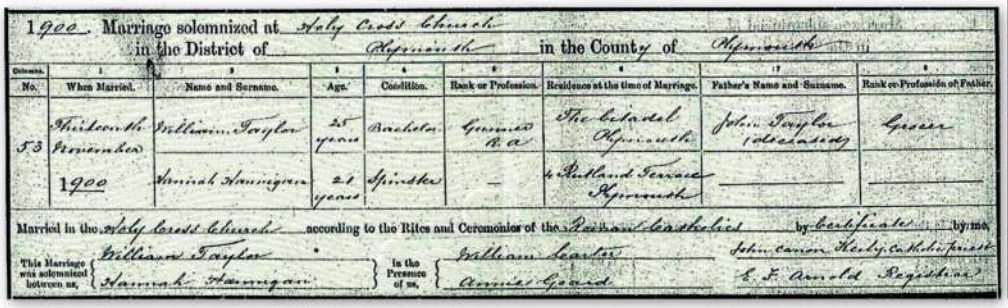
Shortly after, I had a DNA match with one of Sarah Ann Beever's descendants in Australia, and through this I connected with my distant cousin Jill O'Sullivan. We began corresponding, and Jill came to the UK in March 2025. We had a lovely time getting to know her, and visiting places such as Fort Brockhurst in Gosport where William served.

William was a bigamist twice over, but he was young when he first married and divorce wasn't an option at the time. Jill charitably said that he found the right woman in the end, and they stayed together for 38 years.

HAVE YOU BROKEN THROUGH A BRICK WALL?

Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*


1900. Marriage solemnized at Holy Cross Church in the District of Plymouth in the County of Plymouth

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
53	Thirteenth November 1900	William Taylor	25 years	Bachelor	Gunner R.A.	The Citadel Plymouth	John Taylor (deceased)	Grocer
		Hannah Hannigan	21 years	Spinster	—	4 Rutland Terrace Plymouth		

Married in the Holy Cross Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Roman Catholics by certificate by me, John Canon Healy, Catholic Priest.

This Marriage was solemnized between us, William Taylor, Hannah Hannigan. In the Presence of us, William Carter, Annie Geard. E. F. Arnold Registrar.

William married Hannah Hannigan bigamously in 1900

Reader Tips

Owen has this advice if you hit a brick wall in your research

- DNA can help to confirm hard-to-prove hypotheses.
- Don't rely on transcriptions alone, because they may well omit crucial details.
- Sometimes our ancestors did things that seem unbelievable at first glance, so don't be too hasty to dismiss a theory.

Around Britain

Merseyside

Jonathan Scott revisits a former industrial powerhouse famous for its maritime heritage

The term 'Merseyside' was coined around the end of the 19th century. In the county reorganisation of 1974 it became the official name for the area that encompassed the boroughs of Birkenhead, Bootle, Liverpool, Southport, St Helens and Wallasey, as well as parts of Cheshire and Lancashire. The Archive Group's website gives an overview of all the most important repositories in the area: **thearchivegroup.org**.

Anyone with ancestral links to Merseyside can explore its past via the British Film Institute's Britain on Film player (**player.bfi.org.uk/britain-on-film/map**), as long as they live in the UK. You can watch hundreds of digitised films from across the region, ranging from full-length professional documentaries to some of the earliest footage ever shot there. Indeed examples from pioneering film-makers Mitchell & Kenyon include *Arrest of Goudie* (1901), which recreates the arrest of Bootle bank clerk Thomas Goudie who had stolen the equivalent of £18 million from the Bank of Liverpool. Today the six-minute film is considered to be the world's first crime reconstruction.

Ancestry has significant collections for both the city of Liverpool and Merseyside

Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) has significant collections covering both the city of Liverpool and Merseyside. It has parish registers, including Catholic ones, electoral

GETTY IMAGES

The Pier Head in the centre of Liverpool

Free Online Records

This month's selection includes nonconformist records and an index of Catholics

List of Catholics

w **tinyurl.com/mers-bio-cath**

View an index of Liverpudlians "known or reputed to be" Catholic in 1767, drawn from the Parliamentary Archives.

Burials

w **toxtethparkcemetery.co.uk**

This website has indexes from a number of Liverpool cemeteries, not just Toxteth Park. Although the site is completely free to use, you do have to register to access the database.

Directories

w **tinyurl.com/lancs-direct**

Visit the website Special Collections Online for **directories from Lancashire** and Cheshire, plus city volumes for Liverpool.

Parish Registers

w **lan-opc.org.uk**

Search transcribed baptism, marriage, banns and burial records from Lancashire, many from parishes in Liverpool.

Newspaper Articles

w **old-mersey times.co.uk**

This website is a treasure trove of transcriptions from local newspapers, including mining accidents, court reports, bankrupts and family notices.

Nonconformist Records

w **tinyurl.com/fs-noncon-lncs**

FamilySearch's holdings include this index and image collection of nonconformist church records in Lancashire.

rolls and crew lists, and vagrant registers drawn from Lancashire Archives (**lancashire.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives/archives-and-record-office/**). Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) also has Catholic registers as well as Liverpool workhouse, school and newspaper records, alongside data from the Liverpool & South West Lancashire Family History Society (**lswlfhs.org.uk**).

Targeted By German Bombers

During the Second World War Liverpool was the most heavily bombed area of the country outside London, and sadly by the end of the war the city had suffered more than 4,000 casualties. Thanks to a volume that survives at Liverpool Record Office (LRO; **liverpool.gov.uk/libraries/archives-family-history/archives-liverpool-record-office/**), you can trace a kind of grim census of nearly every significant raid in and around the city.

The first enemy bombs landed in fields near the villages of Thurstaston, Irby and Neston on the morning of 29 July 1940. In the early hours of 9 August 1940, a servant girl became one of the first casualties when a bomb struck a house in Prenton Lane, Prenton, Birkenhead. Then at about 12.25am on 17 August 1940, a bomb damaged the Overhead Railway and the corner of a grain silo on the Dock Road. The volume reads: "There had been many 'alerts' before this date, but this was the first time a bomb of any description was dropped actually in Liverpool."

These air-raid records form part of the collections in LRO's Digital Archive: **liverpool.access.preservica.com/**. Other highlights include city engineers' and housing photos, plus community history projects and oral histories. Research Officer Lauren Lavery says that staff are continuing to add to the digital collections, so it's worth checking back for new material.

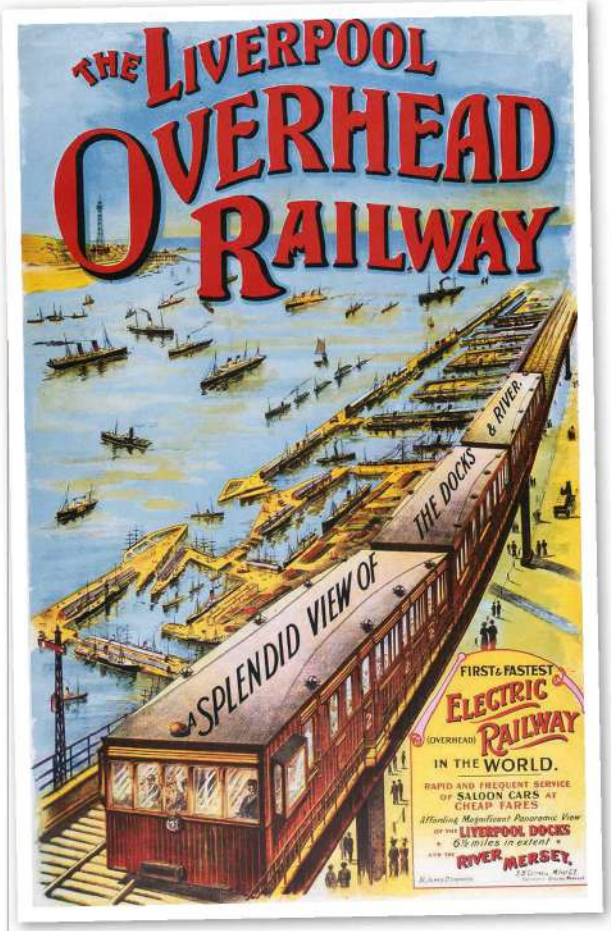
Free Online Resources

LRO is found on the third floor of the city's Central Library on William Brown Street. Computers provide free access to Ancestry, Findmypast and the British Newspaper Archive (**britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**), plus you can search microfilm collections of local newspapers, parish records, burial registers, street directories, workhouse records, and quarter-sessions calendars of prisoners. ▶

LRO also preserves the National Trust's Edward Chambré Hardman Collection, a vast archive spanning the 1920s to the 1980s containing many thousands of pictures taken by husband-and-wife photographers Edward Chambré and Margaret Hardman, who had a studio at 59 Rodney Street (**nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/liverpool-lancashire/the-hardmans-house**). Together they recorded not only generations of Liverpudlians, but the changing face of their city too.

Asylum Records

Other collections include the records of Rainhill Hospital (also known as Rainhill Asylum), which feature admissions papers and casebooks, and documents from the West Derby Union, recording the names of children sent to Canada, as well as the Catholic Emigration Society. You'll also find material relating to industrial, reformatory and orphanage schools, as well as 'Father Berry's Homes' run by an organisation established in the city by Father John Berry in the late 19th century to care for Catholic children.



A promotional poster for the Liverpool Overhead Railway, c1910

Occupational material includes staff wages and pension books from the Ogden branch of the Imperial Tobacco Company, plus the employee register of the Liverpool Overhead Railway, which operated from 1893 until 1956.

Another fascinating item is the 'Change of Residence Book'. This single volume covers 1912–1963, recording the registrations of warehousemen, cab and hackney drivers, giving the date and description of the licences, in addition to their names and addresses.

The first slave ship to sail from Liverpool departed in 1699. In less than 50 years the city became Britain's biggest slave-trading port, and merchants trafficked an estimated 1.5 million people before the trade was abolished. Now a major regeneration of Liverpool's waterfront will put slavery under the spotlight.

The International Slavery Museum (**liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/international-slavery-museum**) started life as a gallery in the basement of the Maritime Museum (**liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime-museum**) in 1994. Plans are under way for the former Albert Dock Traffic Office to become a new entrance pavilion for the International Slavery Museum. Meanwhile nearby Canning Dock, where ships that trafficked enslaved Africans were fitted out and repaired, will be opened to the public.

Both museums are closed ahead of the multi-million-pound project (**liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/waterfront-transformation-project**). The museum archive collections are also closed to the public, but they are soon to be made accessible at an alternative venue. These include records of seafarers, shipping companies, maritime businesses, and the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board.

Research Shipbuilding Kin

Other useful research hubs in Merseyside include Wirral Archives in Birkenhead, which preserves, alongside records of schools, hospitals, workhouses and courts, material from the important shipbuilding company Cammell Laird. You can find out more on the service's website: **wirral.gov.uk/wirral-archives.**

Meanwhile St Helens' historic Gamble Building is the home of the borough's archive service (**sthelens.gov.uk/article/3145/Archive-and-Heritage**), which preserves occupational sources such as ledgers from the Greenall Whitley brewery, and the archives of the Vulcan Foundry.

The archive service also has St Helens Medical Officer of Health reports, which shed light on the harsh reality of Victorian living conditions, as well as material relating to Sir Thomas Beecham and the corporate archive of the Beecham's Pills empire.

TOP TIP!

You can search for local slave owners who applied for compensation under the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act on the website of the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery: **ucl.ac.uk/lbs/**.

LOCAL INDUSTRY

Soap Did your relation manufacture the products that helped keep the nation clean?

The Lever Brothers' soap factory in Port Sunlight, 1897

Port Sunlight is a model village built by Lever Brothers to accommodate workers in its soap factory, with construction beginning in the late 19th century. The name was taken from its most popular soap brand, Sunlight. Today it's also home to the Unilever Archives (**archives-unilever.com**) which spans several centuries, featuring additional soap brands Pears Soap and Lux, plus other household names such as Colman's, Wall's, Lipton, Persil, PG Tips and Marmite. The vast range of material includes minute books, financial records, and a wealth of advertising and packaging. Searchroom visits are by prior appointment, although note that the archive is fully booked until the end of 2025.

GETTY IMAGES

DIRECTORY

ARCHIVES & LIBRARIES

Liverpool Record Office

a **3rd Floor, Central Library, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3 8EW**
t 0151 233 5883
e *archives@liverpool.gov.uk*
w **liverpool.gov.uk/libraries/archives-family-history/archives-liverpool-record-office/**

Material at LRO includes indexes of births, marriages and deaths; burial records; street directories; electoral registers; maps; school, hospital and workhouse records; photos; and coroners' inquests. Many of the registers can only be consulted on microfilm or via Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) – for those that have not been microfilmed or digitised, volumes can be viewed by appointment.

Knowsley Archives Service

a **The ARK, 1st Floor, The Kirkby Centre, Norwich Way, Kirkby, Knowsley L32 8XY**
t 0151 443 4365
e *infoheritage@knowsley.gov.uk*
w **archives.knowsley.gov.uk**

The archives here include school, hospital, council, club, business and court records. There's a large oral history collection, plus material relating to the Malayan Teachers' Training College.

Lancashire Archives

a **Bow Lane, Preston, Lancashire PR1 2RE**
t 01772 533039
e *archives@lancashire.gov.uk*
w **lancashire.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives/archives-and-record-office/**

County-wide collections include quarter-sessions records and probate material. You can search the online catalogue LANCAT for individuals in specific types of archives by entering your relation's name in the 'Any text' field and choosing an option from the 'Look in…' dropdown.

Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral Archives

a **Metropolitan Cathedral, Cathedral House, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool L3 5TQ**
t 0151 709 9222
e *enquiries@metcathedral.org.uk*
w **liverpoolmetrocathedral.org.uk/history-heritage/cathedral-diocesan-archives/**

Visit for non-register parish material covering the Roman Catholic Diocese of Liverpool, extending into Lancashire, Cheshire, the Isle of Man and Greater Manchester.

National Museums Liverpool: The Archives Centre

a **2nd Floor, Maritime Museum, Royal Albert Dock, Liverpool L3 4AQ**
e *maritime.archives@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk*
w **liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/archives-centre**

Closed to the public until spring 2028, the centre houses Mersey Docks and Harbour Board records, merchant-shipping records, and material relating to slave traders and abolitionists.

Sefton Library Service

a **Crosby Road North, Waterloo, Liverpool L22 0LQ**
t 0151 934 6401
e *information.services@sefton.gov.uk*
w **sefton.gov.uk/libraries**

The service holds 10,000 ledgers, minutes, logbooks and journals, 2,000 maps and 40,000 historic photos from townships in the Metropolitan Borough of Sefton.

St Helens Archive Service

a **The Gamble Building, Victoria Square, St Helens WA10 1DY**
t 01744 671748
e *archives@sthelens.gov.uk*
w **sthelens.gov.uk/article/3145/Archive-and-Heritage**

Resources here include St Helens Medical Officer of Health reports, and archives from the Vulcan Foundry and Beecham's Pills. Local studies facilities including microfilm records are also available at Eccleston and Newton-le-Willows libraries.

Unilever Archives

a **Wood Street, Port Sunlight, Wirral CH42 4UY**
t 0151 641 6272
e *archives@unilever.com*
w **unilever-archives.com**

Material here includes business records and in-house magazines.

University Of Liverpool Special Collections & Archives

a **Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool, PO Box 123, Liverpool L69 3DA**
t 0151 794 2696
e *scastaff@liverpool.ac.uk*
w **libguides.liverpool.ac.uk/library/sca**

Records from local slave voyages, cotton ledgers and papers from slave merchants are held here.

Wirral Archives

a **Lower Ground Floor, Cheshire Lines Building, Canning Street, Birkenhead CH41 1ND**
t 0151 606 2929
e *archives@wirral.gov.uk*
w **wirral.gov.uk/wirral-archives**

Highlights include records of shipbuilder Cammell Laird, as well as material from schools, hospitals, workhouses and courts.

GROUPS & SOCIETIES

Lancashire Family History & Heraldry Society

w **lfhhs.org.uk**

The society has research centres in Chorley and Oswaldtwistle.

Liverpool & South West Lancashire Family History Society

w **lswlfhs.org.uk**

The group runs a helpdesk at LRO on Tuesday afternoons.

North Meols Family History Society

w **nmfhssouthport.co.uk**

The society also runs a helpdesk, at The Atkinson in Southport.

St Helens Townships Family History Society

w **sthelenstownshipsfhs.org.uk**

Via the website you can purchase indexes and transcriptions on CD.

Wigan Local History And Heritage Society

w **wiganlocalhistoryandheritagesociety.org**

The society has researched the history of buildings in King Street.

MUSEUMS

National Museums Liverpool

w **liverpoolmuseums.org.uk**

Learn about heritage attractions.

WEBSITES

Ancestry

w **bit.ly/anc-search-lpl**

The site has local parish registers, Catholic registers, electoral rolls and crew lists. Liverpool cemeteries also feature in this collection: **bit.ly/anc-cem-reg**.

The Archive Group

w **thearchivegroup.org**

The group represents repositories from across Liverpool, plus the metropolitan boroughs of Knowsley, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral, and Halton in Cheshire.

Midwifery register, 1920–1924

Kate Jarman from Barts Health NHS Trust Archives shares a record of a pioneering maternity scheme Interview By Rosemary Collins

Founded in 1123 alongside a medieval priory, St Bartholomew's Hospital in London has provided continuous patient care on the same site for longer than any other hospital in England. Barts Health NHS Trust Archives holds extensive records of its history and its role in healthcare. For centuries, one of the biggest dangers for women was childbirth. By 1850, about 50 women in 10,000 died while giving birth – and the figure hadn't improved a century later. The archive has a register of a remarkable scheme that sought to reverse this trend by providing poor women with comprehensive maternity care. This month the trust's archivist Kate Jarman tells us more.

What Gem Did You Pick?

This is a volume from the series we hold of 'External Midwifery' patient registers for St Bartholomew's. The registers record the details of pregnant women who had applied for a midwifery or 'midder' clerk to attend them for the delivery of their child, with some details about the birth itself and the condition of the mother and child.

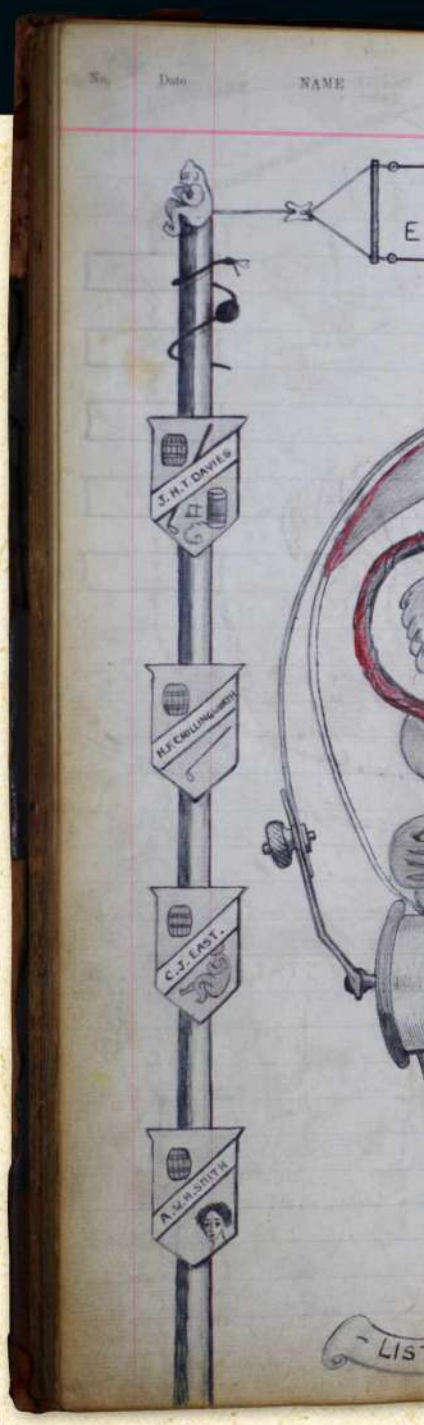
An 'Out-door Midwifery Service' was set up at St Bartholomew's in 1849 on the recommendation of Charles West, physician accoucheur (obstetric physician) and 'Lecturer in Midwifery & Diseases of Women and Children' at the hospital. West later went on to found the Hospital for Sick Children at Great Ormond Street (now known as Great Ormond Street Hospital); in his role at St Bartholomew's, he wanted to establish a service to support women during home births. As a voluntary hospital, supported by charitable subscriptions, St Bartholomew's provided medical care free of charge for those unable to afford to pay for it. Occasionally the scheme could be controversial – in 1896, the hospital recorded a complaint from a Dr WHJ Brown regarding the detrimental effect on his practice due to this free medical service being offered in his area.

At the time, it was the norm for women to give birth at home. Although several maternity hospitals had been established in London from the mid-1700s onwards, hospital births were still fairly unusual, and there was no dedicated maternity ward at St Bartholomew's itself until 1910. The hospital is located in West Smithfield, near the Old Bailey on the edge of the City of London, and in the Victorian era the local neighbourhood was more densely populated than it is today, with notorious slum housing at nearby Saffron Hill and an area around Turnmill Street known as 'Little Hell'.

The new service, which later became known as the External Midwifery Department, assigned medical students to attend women during labour, under West's supervision. Potential patients had to live on the north side of the Thames, and reside within a mile of the hospital – although in the 20th century the scheme was widened out to other boroughs of London, including Shoreditch.

Expectant mothers would apply to the hospital, and if their application was successful, they would be issued with a letter of entitlement to assistance from the service. Their details would then be recorded plus their expected month of confinement, and their case would be assigned to one of the midder clerks who each handled up to 30 cases.

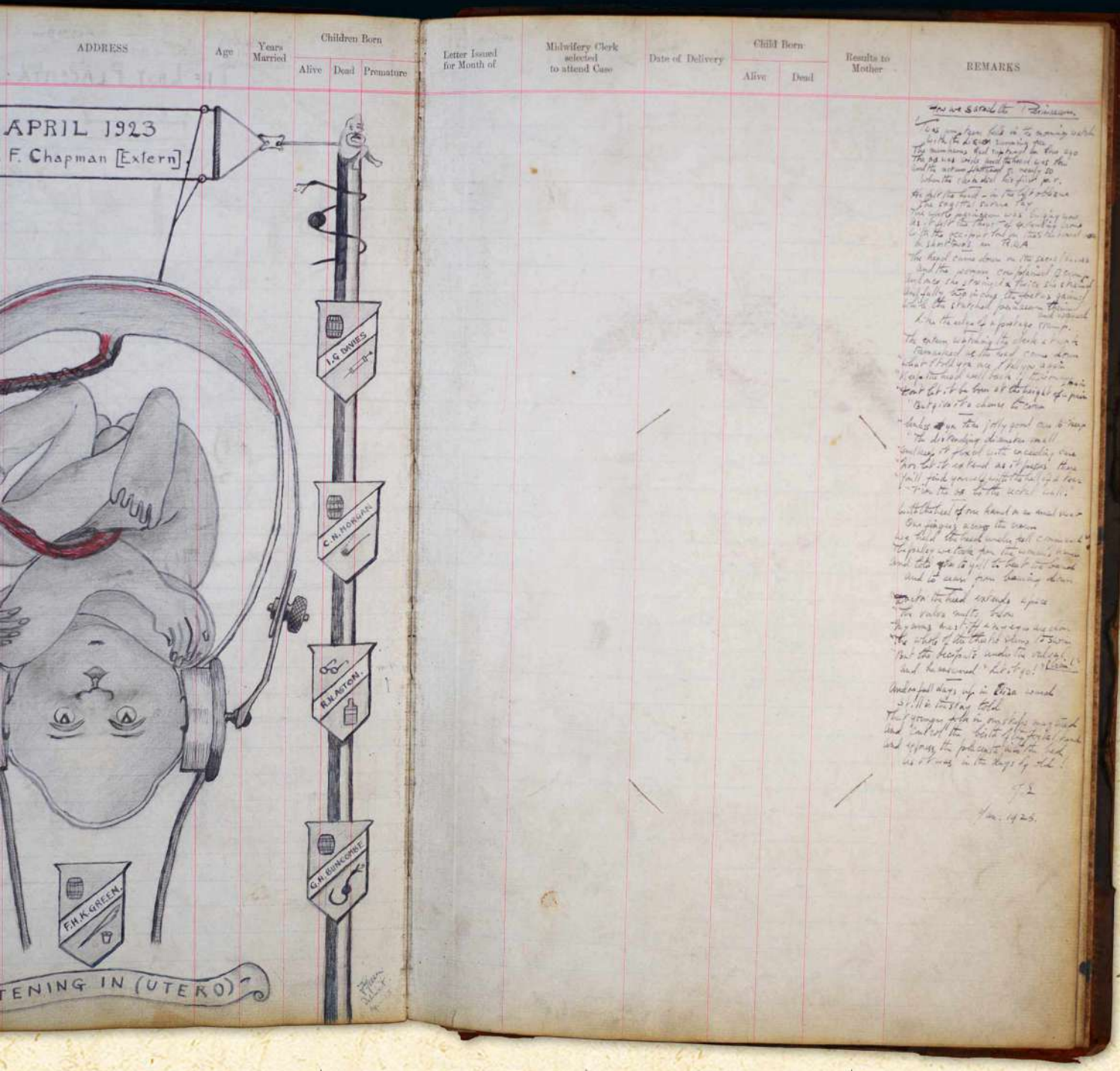
From 1892 responsibility for the External Midwifery Department was allocated to an external midwifery assistant, appointed for a three-month period, who was expected to live in an apartment close to the hospital allocated to him by the hospital's governors. The assistant oversaw up to seven students at the hospital who were serving



Visit Us

Barts Health NHS Trust Archives
a St Bartholomew's Hospital, West Smithfield, London EC1A 7BE
t 020 3465 7608
e *barts.archives@nhs.net*
w **bartshealth.nhs.uk/barts-health-archives**

The archive is open Tuesday to Friday, 9.30am–12.30pm and 1pm–4pm. Note that every appointment should be booked at least one week in advance.



as midder clerks; they were appointed for one month during which they were temporarily relieved of their other clinical duties, and lived in the apartment with the assistant, on call should they be required to assist one of their allocated patients. Clerks visited mothers daily for a week after the birth.

Why Is This Particular Volume So Special?

Not all the records of the department survive, but this series of patient registers is a complete run for 1904–1960, when the scheme and department were finally abolished. This is the sixth register in the series, covering 1920–1924. It is of course interesting as a record of maternity care, individual patient stories, and social history in the local area, but for me the real interest of the register – and the other volumes – come from the end pages, which have been used by successive cohorts of midder clerks for humorous sketches, mottos, cartoons and poems that reflect on their roles. The sketches are often quite artistically accomplished, and include medically accurate drawings of infants, caricatures of female midwives, and often fleas and other insects, which were present at many of the homes the clerks attended.

I find them fascinating for what they reveal about the men who made them – no women were admitted as medical students at St Bartholomew's until 1947 – and the department's culture, which was jokey, competitive and often derogatory of the patients. These unofficial notes and drawings capture a fascinating story of the intersections of class, gender and medical culture in the role of the midder clerk.

What Other Items Are In Your Collection?

These registers are part of the St Bartholomew's Hospital Collection, one of the largest held by Barts Health NHS Trust Archives. Our holdings reach back to 1137 and include records relating to staff, patients, buildings and management of the hospitals in the current Barts Health group, plus more than 30 other hospitals as well as institutions, charities, organisations and individuals involved in healthcare and training in the City and East London. To support our work, including the planned conservation of these registers to make them more accessible, visit **justgiving.com/fundraising/bharchives.**

REVIEWS

The latest books on history and genealogy, plus apps, podcasts and websites

SOFTWARE

Heredis 2026

For Windows and macOS

$39.99 Windows ($29.99 upgrade), $69.99 macOS ($44.99 upgrade); heredis.com/en/

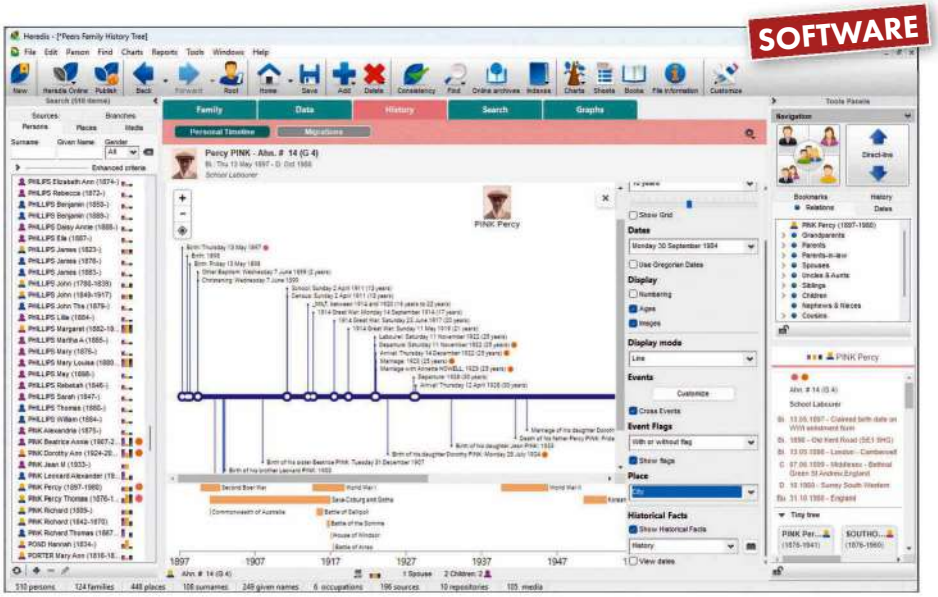
Say hello to the new Heredis, which is a lot like the old Heredis, but with one headline new feature – personal and family timelines – and a smattering of minor tweaks and improvements elsewhere.

Timelines is at least a worthy addition. Accessed via a dedicated button under the 'History' tab, it'll automatically generate a horizontal timeline of the currently selected person with all of their events listed in a visually pleasing manner. Beneath this you'll see a list of general historical facts. You can export your timelines for printing or sharing with others. Although the supplied facts database is very thin and USA-centric, you can add your own if you want to curate your own custom selection.

Beyond this feature, however, it's slim pickings. A separate Family Timeline displays everyone in your tree with simple horizontal timelines (no details). Users gain the ability to add more diverse parental links over simple biological 'Mum' and 'Dad'. The genealogy wheel gains a redesigned options palette, and you can now combine multiple flags when you're filtering your searches.

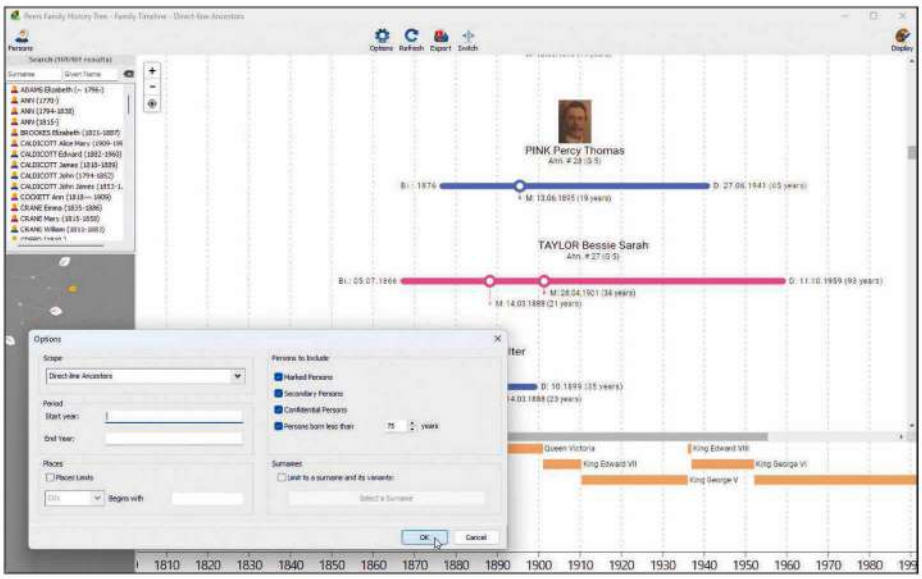
The problem is that Heredis 2026 feels like it's losing ground against its rivals. The user interface feels increasingly dated (and sluggish when switching views) while other than a cursory connection to FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**), there's still no direct integration with online services. The software may still appeal to those looking for a feature-packed program with the ability to host a slick-looking website through Heredis' own online portal. For our money, though, it's a much harder sell as an upgrade from last year's landmark release. Be sure to give the demo version a test drive to decide if the Timeline and smattering of improvements is worth the cost of upgrading.

Nick Peers is a family historian and software expert, and writes a regular 'Tech Tips' article for *WDYTYA? Magazine*



The only major new feature of note in Heredis 2026 is the addition of personal timelines

The main view has barely changed over the years – minor tweaks, but little else



There's also a Family Timeline chart, but it's simply the previous Family Chronology view renamed

DIGITAL PICKS

Rosemary Collins highlights three digital resources that caught our eye this month

PODCAST

Tales From The Battlefields

Podcast services and www.terrystours.co.uk/Podcast

Battlefield guide Terry Whenham tells the forgotten stories of ordinary people from the First World War. Episodes cover individual soldiers, specific battalions, and themes such as how the war affected relationships, and the children of soldiers who never returned. Free.

RADIO

The Essay: Books For Brighter Blackouts

tinyurl.com/bbc-sounds-books-blackouts (UK only) or bbc.com

In this series of Radio 3's *The Essay*, Prof. Emma Smith looks at the history of books and reading in Britain during the Second World War. Subjects featured across the five episodes include the 29 December 1940 air raid in which Paternoster Row, London's publishing district, was devastated, paperbacks that were specially produced for servicemen and women, and recipe books during the time of rationing. Free.

WATCH

Mill Road History

youtube.com/@millroadhistory/videos

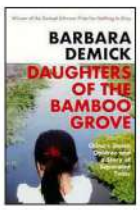
This YouTube channel from the Mill Road History Society (**millroadhistory.org.uk**), dedicated to one of the busiest roads in Cambridge, features lectures on topics including the fate of George Brewster, a young chimney sweep who died in 1875, and the Cambridge Female Refuge, opened in 1838.

Daughters Of The Bamboo Grove

China's Stolen Children And A Story Of Separated Twins

Barbara Demick
Granta, 336 pages, £20

ADOPTION



Daughters of the Bamboo Grove is the extraordinary, powerful and heart-wrenching story of identical Chinese twin girls, Fangfang and Shuangjie, who were separated a few months before their second birthday in 2002. Fangfang was stolen and trafficked to the US for adoption where she was given the name Esther, while Shuangjie remained with her birth family in China. The book's author Barbara Demick, who spent seven years as a correspondent in Beijing, was eventually able to reunite the twins in 2019.

Their story is set against the backdrop of China's brutal one-child policy which resulted in hefty fines for breaches, as well as forced sterilisations and widespread child abandonment. As the supply of adoptable girls ran out, the authorities resorted to stealing children to fuel the demands of the lucrative international child-adoption industry. Esther's adoptive family paid out $25,000 for her adoption, and another $3,000 to the orphanage where they thought she had been abandoned. By 2015, an estimated 20,000 children were kidnapped annually to meet foreign demand.

Reunited twin sisters Esther *(left)* and Shuangjie

The twins' contrasting lives raise poignant questions about the interplay of nature and nurture, the impact of the one-child policy and the ethics of international adoption.

This sensitively written and empathetic book is a must for anyone interested in adoption and identity.

Debbie Kennett is a genetic genealogist and the author of *DNA and Social Media* (The History Press, 2011). Don't miss her buyer's guide to DNA testing on page 23

Reader Review YOUR CHANCE TO ASSESS THE LATEST BOOKS

FAMILY BIOGRAPHY

Strong Roots A Ukrainian Family Story Of War, Exile And Hope

Olia Hercules
Bloomsbury, 288 pages, £20

This book by professional chef Olia Hercules about her Ukrainian family history and family recipes is a very personal story. Its contents are inspirational. They motivate the reader to explain to others that our struggles are best understood through our love and emotions of and for our loved ones, and attention is drawn to the importance of family gatherings to stimulate mental recall of events.

The book gives the reader insight into what life was like in the USSR and Ukraine under Stalin and his successors. The pain of losing your home to an occupying enemy is felt in Hercules' story, and she writes powerfully about Ukrainians rediscovering their national identity and independence.

Lusia Mardarenko, the author's grandmother, and her children

Reflecting on the book as a whole may encourage the reader to consider their own family history, and record events and their causal and dependent decisions for posterity.

It may also cause the reader to reflect upon events in history that they or their forebears have personal experience of, or have witnessed first-hand.

Andrew Innes, Stevenage
Andrew has been researching his own and his wife's family histories for 54 years

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YUAN WANG | AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

TV & RADIO

Rosemary Collins previews upcoming programmes on history and family history

The Truth About Phyllis Twigg

BBC Radio 4 and BBC Sounds
Christmas Eve

The remarkable Phyllis Twigg/Moira Meighn was also a cookery writer and TV chef

This new Radio 4 play is the perfect festive treat to listen to while you're peeling your vegetables for Christmas dinner. For years, the official record said that the world's first radio drama was *The Comedy of Danger* by Richard Hughes, broadcast on the BBC in 1924. However, in fact it was *The True Story of Father Christmas* – a play for children by children's author and doctor's wife Phyllis Twigg, who wrote under the pseudonym Moira Meighn.

The play aired on Christmas Eve 1922, approximately six weeks after the BBC first started broadcasting on 14 November 1922. Like many other female pioneers who made history, Phyllis was erased from the record, until her contribution was rediscovered a century later.

The Truth About Phyllis Twigg imagines the writer's story in two timelines. In 1922, Phyllis (voiced by Tamsin Greig) approaches Arthur Burrows (Rory Kinnear), the station director and broadcaster of the BBC's fledgling 2LO studio, with her idea for a Christmas play for children. But can she come up with inspiration in time? And will broadcasting drama live on radio work? A century later, in 2025, podcaster Jenny Adams (Aja Dodd) wants to prove that Phyllis wrote the world's first radio play. But can she find the evidence in the archives?

The Truth About Phyllis Twigg is a charming tale of creativity and optimism, with plenty of witty lines. "Hope may be at the centre of Christmas, but the Angel Gabriel still gave Mary nine months' notice," Phyllis tells Arthur at one point. But it's also a depiction of how audio technology has changed over time – from the dawn of radio, when the BBC enabled our ancestors to hear voices from hundreds of miles away for the first time, to the modern age of digital overload. And anyone who has had trouble tracing a forgotten relative will cheer for Jenny's journey into the archives on the trail of this unfairly neglected trailblazer.

Rob Hall gets to grips with the javelin thrown by Roman legionaries in the series

Britain's Lost Battlefields

Sky History and Sky History Play
3 December

The British landscape may seem peaceful now – but it is the site of many bloody historic battles, as our forebears lived through wars that shaped the country we live in today. In this series, presenter Rob Bell visits the locations of some of Britain's most important clashes, trying everything from the weapons the soldiers used to the food they ate, and talking to historians and archaeologists to find out what happened and why the battle was so important. In the first episode he visits the site of the Battle of Bannockburn, a 1314 clash between the Scots led by Robert the Bruce and the English under Edward II.

The Abandons

Netflix
4 December

This new drama takes us to the brutal world of the frontier in the American West. Set in the town of Angel's Ridge in Washington Territory in 1854, the plot centres on the rivalry between two very formidable women. Fiona Nolan (played by Lena Headey) is a matriarch who has adopted four outcast children as her own in a makeshift family living on a cattle ranch. But Constance Van Ness (Gillian Anderson), a widow who inherited a silver mining fortune from her late husband, has her eye on Fiona's land. When Fiona resists her efforts to buy her out, it leads to a conflict as dramatic as any classic Western.

Call The Midwife

BBC One
Christmas Day

No Christmas would be complete without a tear-jerking yet heart-warming trip to Nonnatus House. The latest *Call the Midwife* Christmas special sees Fred (Cliff Parisi) and Violet (Annabelle Apsion) head to Hong Kong to see her son Derek (Nicholas Atkinson). But they visit the Hong Kong Branch House of the order only to find that the building has collapsed. A rescue mission from London, which is led by Dr Turner (Stephen McGann) and his wife Shelagh (Laura Main), is hastily dispatched to help the injured and the local people who depend on the Branch House, but they also have to contend with the influence of the Triad gangs.

Meanwhile, back in the East End, Joyce (Renee Bailey) and Sister Catherine (Molly Vevers) are called to a Traveller encampment to attend a birth, while the Cubs make their preparations for the carnival parade – and a mysterious Mr Fischer (Henry Goodman) asks to rent Cyril's (Zephryn Taitte) flat.

BBC | HEARST NETWORKS

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Our January issue goes on sale on **30 December**

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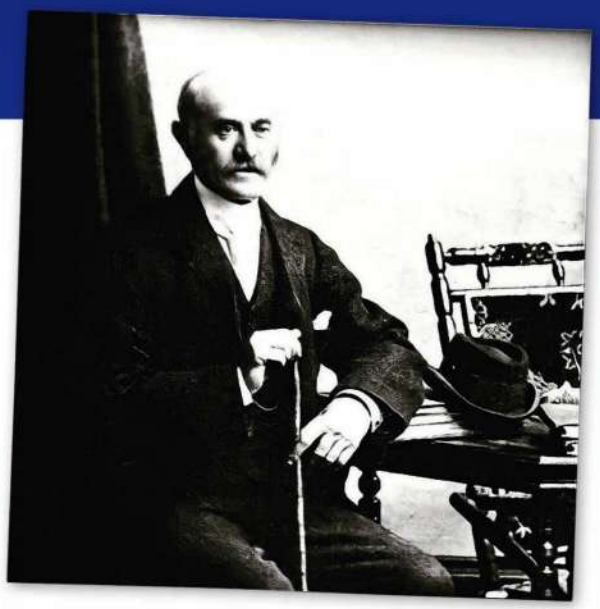
'James Fought For Crofters' Rights'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

John McLellan pays tribute to his ancestor who bravely campaigned for tenants on a Scottish island, and paid a heavy price. By **Gail Dixon**



John's inspirational great great grandfather James Leonard

The island of Rousay in Scotland's Orkney archipelago is known as the 'Egypt of the North', since it is home to more than 100 archaeological sites. It was also the scene of an exodus of crofters during the 19th century who were evicted by rapacious landlords. Among them were members of John McLellan's family, whose ancestors had lived on the island for centuries.

"My great great grandfather James Leonard was born on Rousay in 1835, to Peter Leonard and his wife Isobel McKinlay," John explains. "The family lived on a croft called Digro."

Life was hard for the crofters, who usually practised a trade such as weaving or shoemaking in addition to subsistence farming. For his part James became a stonemason, and his services were in demand across the island. The women of Rousay toiled on the land, as well as raising their families in isolated cottages.

"James was a deeply religious man, who served as a lay preacher and a temperance advocate." He was also an accomplished singer, performing at concerts and at the Free Kirk (church) on Rousay.

James married fellow islander Hannah Reid in 1859, and they raised 14 children at Digro. "They must have been devastated in 1879 when they lost three of their sons, Arthur, William and George, within a fortnight to diphtheria."

The crofters lived in constant fear of eviction, and James would have witnessed the terrible events of 1845 when Rousay landowner George William Traill forced 215 people off their land. Seeking to create a more profitable estate, he replaced the crofters with sheep and destroyed their farmsteads.

Traill died in 1847, and the estate passed to his great nephew Frederick William Traill-Burroughs who later reached the rank of lieutenant-general in the British Army. Traill-Burroughs built a mansion on the island that was financed by charging crofters extortionate rents.

James was a man of principle and honour, who wanted to do right by those round him

John discovered that James took a defiant stand against his landlord. "After my grandfather David Leonard died I remember people in Grandmother's house looking through William PL Thompson's book *The Little General and the Rousay Crofters*, which was published by John Donald in 1981.

"There was a picture of a very stern-looking man, who I discovered was James Leonard. The book also revealed that in 1883 James testified before the Napier Commission, which was established following unrest to investigate conditions for crofters.

JOHN McLELLAN from Clydebank, West Dunbartonshire, Scotland, is a teacher and genealogist (**yourhistoryguy.com**)

"James represented the people of Rousay when the commission reached the Orkneys. He also sought assurance from Traill-Burroughs that there would be no retribution against any of the crofters who gave evidence, but he refused to give it."

Despite the risk, James wasn't cowed and bravely took the stand to plead for security of tenure. He stated, in no uncertain terms, "We are under the despotism and terror of the landlord and we want that removed."

The commission's report opened the door to protection for crofters, and raised public awareness of their plight.

Finally, they were granted security of tenure by the 1886 Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Act.

James' courage came at a terrible cost, as he was evicted from Digro soon after testifying. "It must have broken his heart to leave beautiful Rousay."

The Leonards moved to Oban in Argyll and Bute, where James set up a successful business as a coal merchant. He passed away in 1913 at the age of 77, leaving many proud descendants.

In 2001, a commemorative stone was erected at Digro in James' memory.

"I visited Digro in 2013," John reveals, "and was surprised by just how emotionally charged the experience was.

"It was lovely to see the memorial to James. He was a man of principle and honour, who wanted to do right by those around him. It's good to know that his fight isn't forgotten."

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